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PERPLEXITY.

BY

SYDNEY MOSTYN.

'Beloved! if I wander far and oft
From that which I believe, and feel, and know,
Thou wilt forgive . . .
Knowing that I, though often blind and false
To those I love, and O, more false than all
Unto myself, have been most true to thee.'

J. R. LOWELL.

VOL. I.



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INSCRIBED

TO

MRS. VALENTINE.

PERPLEXITY.



CHAPTER I.

I stood looking on a scene in which earth and sky were mingling in a confusion of snow. An early night had descended in a sombre shadow of cloud; but the snow gave a radiance of its own to the air, and I could trace the network of the naked trees, hardened by the long frost into iron, with motionless birds sunk deep within their feathers for warmth, making knots upon the branches. The hill inclining from our garden, and towering many feet above the roof of our cottage, resembled in its white envelopment a huge barrow, a Titanic burial-mound of snow. The hard northerly blast tossed the snow-flakes in

the air like an ocean of foam overhead, in which I fancied I could discern writhing outlines, convulsed shapes, to which the wailing blast gave voices.

I had been watching with a vacant eye the gambols of a kitten leaping at the flakes from the ambush of the half-opened scullery door ; but the exertion proving fruitless, and the wind unendurable, Kitty had retreated to the parlour, and, with perpendicular tail and hoarse metallic snore, was drying her streaked fur against my dress.

Suddenly I remarked a tall shape turn the angle of the hill, and with bowed head plough his way rapidly towards our cottage. It was too dark to discern the fragment of face showing between the shawl enveloping his throat, and the deer-stalking hat drawn low over his brow. But I was familiar with that stalwart outline of greatcoat, with those broad shoulders and that muscular gait.

‘What can Mr. Graham want?’ I wondered. He gave me no time for further conjectures,

but approaching the low door, appealed upon it with a brisk and powerful knock. As the kitchen made a wing of the house, and as the only servant we could afford to keep was deaf, I thought it best to open the door myself, that he might not be kept waiting in the cold. On presenting myself, I dropped a mock curtsy.

‘What have we done to merit the honour of a visit from Mr. Graham on such a day as this?’ I enquired.

He answered with a smile, kicking the stiff collection of snow from his boots, and shaking himself free of the flakes like a Newfoundland dog, before he entered; then clasping my hand, he said,

‘You ought not to have come to the door; the wind searches one as though it were charged with needles. Is your father in, Miss Howard?’

‘Yes, in his study as usual, smoking his afternoon pipe, or asleep over the supplement of the day before yesterday’s “Times.” Come in and warm yourself.’

He was busy extricating his neck from the folds of the shawl. He did not speak, but during the process stared at me fixedly with a pair of keen black mutinous eyes, scintillant with an expression half deprecatory, half defiant.

‘I shall be glad to warm my hands,’ he said. ‘I verily believe I have lost all my finger nails. It wasn’t snowing when I left, though had it pelted icebergs I should have come.’

I led him into the parlour. He commenced chafing his hands with quick defiant gesture before the fire. I watched him. I was not surprised at his visit. He had called now a good many Saturdays running, professing to take great pleasure in smoking a pipe with papa, and listening to his sea-stories, of which he had a wonderful and fearful abundance. But I marked now something unusual in his manner, and my interest was excited. He did not return my inquisitive gaze, but resolutely watched the ruby glow, occasionally breathing on his fingers and distending his

hands to catch the warmth. As he knelt there, it struck me he looked a fine specimen of a man. I could not tell his age, but he appeared to me something between seven-and-twenty and thirty. He was singularly deep-chested, with limbs solid as though hewn out of granite. His complexion was swarthy. His mouth, undisguised by the thin line of black moustache, was carved in firm deep lines, meeting tight at the extremities. He rose abruptly, and confronted me with a smile, exhibiting a row of white teeth, sharp and shining as an animal's.

‘You are wondering what has brought me here,’ he exclaimed. ‘What a thirsty, speculative look your eyes have!’ Bending, and watching me with great earnestness, ‘What would you give to know my mission?’

His manner, his accent struck me. I tried to meet his brilliant eyes, but failed, as I answered,

‘I have no curiosity. I suppose you are come to have a chat with papa, as usual. You are really considerate to violate his solitude.

This habitation of ours is as cheerful as an iceberg floating in the regions of the Arctic Circle.'

'So you are dull?'

'Dull! you may judge how dull, when I tell you that for the last half-hour or more I have been amusing myself by watching the snow-flakes settle on the window-panes, and thinking what pretty embroidery some of their patterns would make.'

He turned to the fire and recommenced the warming of his hands.

'Suppose I were to tell you that the object of my visit to-day was to inform your father that I had discovered one of his family jewels, and to claim his consent to keep it as the finder.'

'Oh!' I answered, with a light shrug. 'If you have found anything of the kind, you may be sure that it is none of ours. Our family jewels were confiscated by poverty several reigns ago.'

If I had answered in jest he had not

questioned in jest. Earnestness in such a face as his makes the expression sombre. He gazed moodily at the fire; I turned to the window, and drummed an accompaniment on the panes to a half-murmured song.

‘I should like to see your father, Kate, if I may?’ he said.

This was the first time he or any other man but my father had ever called me by my Christian name. I was so ashamed of the deep blush that suddenly reddened my cheeks, that I refrained from confronting him. I lingered a few moments, and then left the room, averting my face as I passed.

As I expected, I found papa dozing before a faded fire. His long clay pipe lay in two pieces at his feet; and each time his chin rubbed his cravat he would jerk his head back with the mechanic action of a man sleeping under protest. I touched his shoulder gently, and he stared in my face.

‘What now—what now?’ he exclaimed thickly.

‘Mr. Graham is here, and wants to see you, papa,’ said I.

‘John Graham?’ he muttered, dropping his head again. ‘Ah!’

‘John Graham, papa,’ I repeated, giving him a push. ‘See, you have broken your pipe. Shall I show him in?’

‘Who’s there? John Graham? Ah, to be sure,’ he exclaimed, sitting up. ‘Show him in, by all means. What time is it?’

‘It’s three o’clock.’

‘Why, I must have been asleep. Hallo! there’s my pipe! That’s the fourth gone this week. It’s the cold that chokes my head and makes me dull. John Graham here, is he? To be sure he is. Show him in, Kate; show him in.’

‘Papa’s in his study, Mr. Graham, if you will go to him,’ said I, as I entered the parlour. He was standing in the erectness of six feet, with his back to the fire, and his hands behind him, with something of an impatient look on his face, which, when I spoke, instantly gave way

to an expression of embarrassment. He eyed me earnestly as he went out.

‘What does all this mean?’ I exclaimed, throwing myself into a chair, and resting my feet on the fender. My heart was beating; my spirits were in a flutter. Was Mr. Graham in love with me? If not, how was I to interpret that pressure of the hand, that half-defiant, half-embarrassed manner; above all, that searching, appealing earnestness of gaze? If judgment failed to witness anything in this, vanity was at all events ready with an interpretation. I was bound to believe he was in love with me.

I stirred the fire briskly, with a short laugh. I rose, and examined my face in the dim little mirror over the mantel-piece, pushed back my amber-coloured hair, and tried to find a reason for my suspicion in the reflection of my features. Yes! *there* was a reason. He was dark; he must needs admire my transparent, daintily-freckled complexion. His eyes were black and mutinous: they must needs find

satisfaction in the repose of my blue, serene orbs. His mouth was firm and inexorable : he must needs admire the contrast of my undecided lips, drawn now, at the extremities, in this moment of speculation, into an expression that woefully signalized an indecision of character, an inertness of principle.

I resumed my seat, and began to wonder whether I liked him. To begin with—did I admire him? I could give no decisive answer to my question. Since all merit is comparative—and since I had seen so very few men in my life to judge from—I was truly at a loss to know whether he was to be considered handsome or not. I believe that most women in their hearts cherish their own ideals of handsome men ; and I am not quite sure at that season of my existence whether my ideal had not a good deal to do with a fair moustache, auburn hair, pinkish cheeks, and unutterably blue eyes, with a low melodious voice which is as pleasant in man as it is necessary in woman.

John Graham was a very fine fellow. When he should have made me love him, I dare say I should think him strikingly handsome. But, thought I, am I right in thinking only of his looks? Must a matrimonial syllogism start with the premiss of a face? I must think of his character. He was no doubt stern; but that sternness was attempered by a certain lofty courtesy of manner which I had often secretly noted with admiration, and which I had heard papa commend over and over again. Of his antecedents I knew little or nothing; but there was that in his mien which was tolerably suggestive of breeding. I doubted his eyes. I guessed that the expression of determination which gave fire to them might be made sinister and menacing should he ever be severely disappointed. I judged that his resolute spirit coupled fruition with design as its inevitable sequence. And to such a soul, disappointment, I thought, would be fatal. It would warp its powers: it would gangrene every generous condition that might enter into

its existence, as a single thunder-clap will sour the choicest vintage. So, you see, I accredited him with virtue enough to become corrupted.

I gave the fire another poke, not a little gratified with the sagaciousness of my reasoning. In estimating his character, considering I was a complete stranger to it, I felt I was doing a very clever thing. I was rearing a pyramid on its apex ; I was building up John Graham's character on no broader foundation than a casual glance of his eye.

Suppose he were to propose to me? I speculated, toasting my feet, for I was suffering from the usual consequence of hard thinking—cold extremities (it is that admirable wit, Professor Holmes, who tells of an author that could never write unless his feet were in warm water). Should I accept him? I raised my eyes to the window. The snow had ceased; but the supreme desolation out of doors was strongly indicated by the black sky, and the pale outline of hill standing dim and ghastly as if frozen by the cruel embraces of a thousand

winters. The desolation struck me full. I tried to suppress a weary sigh, but I felt how utterly sick was my heart of the eternal solitude to which my father's narrow income had consigned me. My spirit panted for the warmth of summer skies—for the gracious communion of friends—for the bonds of sympathy that only social life can forge.

We had known John Graham now very nearly ten months. How we had come to know him, I may as well explain here. Papa had been to Lichendale—a walk of two miles—to get a cheque changed at the bank; he returned somewhat late in the evening, highly pleased with the conversation of one of the clerks in the bank, who had accompanied him part of the way home. ‘He is a gentlemanly, fine-looking young man,’ he said, ‘and I have asked him to come and smoke a pipe with me.’ This being said, the subject dropped.

On the Saturday following, I was occupied in my bedroom, when I was told by Harriet, our servant, that there was a gentleman in the

parlour who had called to see papa. I was sincerely astonished : for, saving the infrequent call of the postman, and the weekly visitation of certain tradespeople, no mortal man ever came to our door. I tidied my hair, arranged my brooch, and went downstairs, where I was introduced to Mr. John Graham. He bowed with a very graceful and stately inclination, and immediately engaged me in a commonplace conversation. In a short time papa invited him into the study (such was our high-sounding name for the little back parlour) ; they retired, and before long I heard sounds of laughter, papa sometimes roaring loudly.

It was a great treat to poor papa to get some one to listen to his stories ; and I was right glad that he should meet with a friend who, if he could not break in upon the monotony of my life, might lessen the tediousness of papa's. When they emerged, papa's face was radiant. Mr. Graham had proved not only an attentive but an appreciative listener ; laughing with no foregone determination to please, but just

where he ought to laugh, and lying in wait with a kind of intellectual torch ready to ignite any of the squibs and rockets of papa's experience that might have missed fire. He was pressed to remain to tea, but declined; desiring, however, to be permitted the 'enjoyment'—his own word—of an occasional visit. He added that he had not laughed so much for years. 'Come as often as you like,' I heard papa say as he opened the hall door; 'you will always find the same armchair and the same welcome.' He might have added 'and the same stories.'

He came pretty punctually after this, always on Saturday afternoons, as being his only leisure time during the week. I rather fancied he looked forward to the visit. He complained dreadfully of the dullness of Lichendale, and borrowed my books to read. He really seemed to find a great pleasure in papa's society, and often spoke to me with admiration of the old man's blunt genuine character. Papa warmly reciprocated his friendship, and I sometimes

felt a pang of disappointment for papa's sake when the Saturday afternoon had arrived without bringing its usual visitor.

To me John Graham had been uniformly the same; quiet, respectful, even cold. I was naturally anxious to know what opinion he had of me; and hoped that in some confidential moment he might impart his impression to papa; for papa was very proud of me, and I easily guessed that during their conversations my name would very often be brought forward. But from his answer to my demure, oblique enquiries, I gathered that as yet Mr. Graham had passed no opinion; and that if my virtues and perfections had ever been flourished before him with paternal triumph, he had listened to everything that had been said without comment or interruption.

Shall I say that I was piqued by this chilling indifference? I suppose I must confess the truth. I needed no better authority than the looking-glass to satisfy me that I was pretty (at the mature age at which I write this, I trust I

may boast of my beauty as a girl without fear of being reproached with vanity). I had never been taught music, but I was musician enough to be able to accompany my small yet clear voice on the harpsichord that had employed the fingers of three generations of Howards; and I am not sure that my songs were the less pretty because they were most of them sea ballads which I had picked up from papa. Of course, I was dreadfully wanting in conventional accomplishments. I had never been to a ball; I doubt if I could have danced anything but a galop; I never read the newspapers, and was ignorant of the current topics of the day. But I had certain pet books of my own, of which I think I knew the contents by heart; and though you would have searched my little mahogany shelves in vain for the works of any living poet or novelist, I beg that you will not think me a dunce. Thrown as I was by solitude upon my own resources for amusement, I was forced into much more reading than was perhaps altogether good for me. Our

library, if rather old and stained, was a very fair one; and unless you except two thick volumes on navigation, and Dr. Johnson's 'Rambler,' there was not a book in it that I had not read two or three times over.

So, computing my merits by my own provincial standard, I felt that Mr. Graham ought to have shown himself a little more impressionable. I should perhaps have felt myself insulted had I been told that I wanted his love; but the truth would have been spoken had it been affirmed that I desired his admiration.

I remained thus musing over the present and the past. I tried to conjecture the meaning of Mr. Graham's recent behaviour towards me, with a strong inclination to believe that he was in love, and with an equally strong inclination to doubt anything of the kind. For I could find positively nothing in the past—no glance, no whisper, no gesture, that helped towards such a conclusion. 'Love,' reasoned I, with grand sagacity, 'is no abrupt passion. It must

'steal upon the heart unawares; and if there is no great and urgent need to hide it, why,' I reflected, 'I don't see how it can help proclaiming itself. I have met Mr. Graham's glance, and I have found in it nothing but the coldness of indifference. I have heard his laugh: it was loud and deep; if he were in love he would not have laughed like that. If he be really my lover, he is surely the queerest lover that ever existed.' And so I went on debating.

To think that a pressure of the hand, a glance of the eye, should throw a woman into so long and agitated a controversy with herself! When will women learn to rightly estimate the things they behold? When will they be brought to comprehend the enormous interval that lies between an 'earnest gaze' and a downright proposal of marriage?

My wrangling reverie was disturbed by the opening of the study door. The pipes and the conversation of the gentlemen were at an end; they would now be coming into the parlour. Had papa asked Mr. Graham to stop to tea, I

wondered? I secretly hoped that he had. I took a furtive peep at myself, swept some rebellious hairs behind my ears, and with a strong tendency to palpitation of the heart, composed myself in my best fashion by the fire. Presently I heard the hall door open; I heard papa say, 'God bless you!' in his hearty way; and in a few moments I discerned the stalwart form of John Graham make towards the base of the hill, behind which it rapidly vanished.

It was now almost time for tea, and dark enough for the lamp to be lighted. I got up thoroughly angry with myself for having indulged my imbecile imagination in so long and ridiculous a reverie. I shook my finger at my pale face in the mirror with as withering a sneer as I could twist my lips into.

'Stupid thing!' I muttered. 'Light the lamp, make the tea, occupy yourself with your own concerns. Do you think John Graham is in love with you? Simpleton! you think yourself pretty—you think yourself clever. Well, *he doesn't*. Madam Dunce, you were born to re-

side among snow-clad moors. Your doom is to make tea for papa, to help Harriet to lay the table-cloth for dinner, to pay the tradespeople when they call with their accounts, and to sing sea-songs to the curled kitten and to papa sound asleep, on a hideous old harpsichord. Give yourself no concern about love ; that epidemic will never reach these moors. And take a piece of advice—the next time a man squeezes your hand, tread upon his corns, and requite a very meaningless act by an act which you may make significant by pain.’

Papa had retreated to his study. I seized the lamp angrily, struck a match which went out ; struck another, which went out too ; then with a stamp of my foot, struck another and lighted the wick. I marched to the window, and shut the shutters with a bang. I then opened the door, and screamed to Harriet to bring the tea. I might as well have screamed to the hills. The old thing’s deafness had never irritated me before ; but I think, had I been a man, I should have used a wicked word at that

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moment. I ran across the hall, and tripped over a mat, nearly breaking my nose against the staircase. This did not improve my temper. Pushing open the kitchen door, I screamed afresh in the old woman's very ear for tea.

'I ain't so deaf as all that, Mees Kate,' she remarked, thrusting her horn snuff-box into the pocket of her apron.

'Then why didn't you answer?'

'Eh?'

'Why didn't you answer?' I screamed again. I discovered that my feelings were greatly relieved by noise, and, had I found an excuse, could, in a very short time, have screamed myself into a good temper.

'It ain't tay time yet,' answered Harriet, surlily eyeing a morose Dutch clock.

'Yes it is,' said I; 'and you'll just get it ready, too;' knocking a noisy tin dish off the dresser to annoy her. And I marched out of the kitchen. The harpsicord stood open; I grasped the excuse for noise, and, seating myself before the instrument, began to strike it fiercely,

drowning its lamentations by singing at the top of my voice.

This uproar was not to continue long. Turning my head, I saw that papa was in the room ; and the moment I caught his glance I ceased. So grave a look I had never before seen on his face. That radiant expression which he was accustomed to wear after the departure of Graham—where was it? He was very serious ; but so calm, so quiet in his seriousness, that it inspired no foreboding. My first impression, I remember, was that John Graham had been relating some particulars of his early life, which, for all I could guess, might be sad enough, and my father's nature was of that sympathetic kind which identifies itself with another's grief, and which bears another's sorrow with a sincerer concern than it could bear its own. I made no remark, but drew a chair to the fireplace.

He was going to address me just as Harriet, looking very sulky, brought in the tea-tray. He remained silent, but watched me with a steadfast gaze that was very unusual in him,

‘What were you going to say, papa?’ I asked, for my curiosity was now excited.

‘Never mind, Kate,’ he replied, ‘make the tea; we can talk afterwards.’

‘Tell me, papa dear,’ said I plaintively.

With an effort to smile, he shook his head, repeating, ‘Make the tea, my darling. You are as inquisitive as my old grandmother, who cut a large spider in two to see where its web came from.’

The comparison was odious, and it silenced me. Throughout the meal very little was said; but I noticed that papa followed me in all my movements, and before tea was half over I was throbbing with curiosity to know what it all meant.

CHAPTER II.

THE tea-things were cleared away, and I had taken a low chair, and was darning a stocking, when papa spoke.

‘Kate, something has happened that’ll interest you to hear, only I don’t know exactly how to begin to tell it.’

‘Begin anywhere, papa, and go on.’

He fidgetted a little on his chair, looked steadfastly on the fire, and then steadfastly on me ; and, bringing his hand with a smart blow on his knee, exclaimed :

‘It’s my opinion Kate, that John Graham wants to marry you. I may say, in fact, that I am quite sure he wants to marry you.’

I uttered a short hysterical laugh.

‘Indeed it’s true, Kate. There’s nothing to

laugh at. I know it has made me feel very serious; turned me as thoughtful as if I had been to a funeral.'

It should have made me thoughtful too, no doubt. As it was I felt a strong inclination to laugh, with a presentiment of tears as a finale.

'He never mentioned this to me, papa.'

'That's where it is,' answered papa meditatively. 'In my opinion Graham is the most honourable young fellow that ever wanted to make a woman his wife.'

'But I certainly think he ought to have spoken to me first. When you courted mamma, hadn't you to get her consent before you talked it over with grandpapa?'

'I can't say,' he replied musingly. 'I never courted your mother—she courted me. I don't remember asking anybody's consent, nor receiving anybody's. There was a good deal of talking over, but I didn't speak much. I remember being taken to the altar, and somebody screaming during the service; but beyond

that I don't recollect much more of my marriage.'

My work was laid aside. I had pushed my chair close to papa's, and was earnestly regarding him.

'Did Mr. Graham really say he wanted to marry me?'

'No, he didn't say it downright.'

'What did he say, then?'

'He began by telling me, in a distant demure way how much he admired you; how you came up to his notion of a soft little loveable woman; and such like. I don't say he put it in this fashion, but that's about what he meant. That young man talks very well—I should say as well as a book. There's a good deal in being able to talk well; it's one sign of breeding, I think. Why, let a gentleman miss an h, and his lineage is blasted for ever.'

The warm blood was in my cheeks; to conceal my red face, I busily examined my fingertips.

'He finds a strong advocate in you, papa.'

‘He deserves to find it,’ he answered warmly. Then he paused. I looked up. ‘Katie,’ he said, ‘I had never meant to tell you how deeply obliged I am to Graham, because I never thought there would be any need of my telling you. But I see the need now. Don’t go and think my pride had anything to do with my silence. You know I can be a grateful man, Kate. If I was silent it was not my fault. It was my promise to him, and my fear of your pride—no, I won’t call it pride, I’ll call it your feelings—that kept me quiet. That’s what it was.’

He adjusted his shirt collar, fixed himself squarely in his seat, and stared fully on me.

‘And what is your obligation to Mr. Graham, papa?’

‘I’ll tell you. If it hadn’t been for Mr. Graham I should have been sued for forty-five pounds, and my furniture sold under an execution. He saved me.’

‘What’s an execution?’ I asked, hardly comprehending enough to be amazed; yet asso-

ciating with the words horrible ideas of the headsman and the gallows.

‘Blest if I know exactly,’ he answered, with a puzzled look. ‘But stay a minute ; I’ve got a guide to the law that will give it.’ He rose, searched the book shelves, and produced a thin volume, which, having put on his glasses, he examined. ‘Here it is,’ he presently exclaimed. “Execution. The judgment of a court may be executed by the arrest of the judgment debtor upon a writ of *ca sa*, or by seizure and sale of his goods upon a writ of *fi fa*. Certain persons are privileged from arrest, but the goods of all judgment debtors are liable to be seized under a *fi fa*.” Do you understand?’ he asked, shutting the book.

‘Not a bit.’

‘Nor I,’ he exclaimed. ‘*Fi fa* ; what’s that ? Anything to do with fee faw fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman, I wonder ? I should think that nursery tale must have been written by a lawyer.’

‘Well, but what is your obligation to Mr. Graham, papa?’


‘I’ll tell you—but don’t be frightened; for it’s over now. You guessed there was something wrong, didn’t you, last July? Do you remember asking me what made me so thoughtful? Well, you shall hear. Eight months ago I heard from a poor fellow who had been my first lieutenant in the ‘Dunedin’ that if he couldn’t raise forty-five pounds by May his furniture would be sold, and he and his wife and his bairns turned into the streets. As he hadn’t a wooden leg, he couldn’t well take to singing, and as he said very justly, “When I get into the streets what am I to do?” Poor Joe! he was a little man, all red hair, black teeth and bow legs, only fit for the water, being like the sea-anemone, which shines only when the tide circles it. He was a smart officer, with a mind stiff with jokes. He had served me more than once. In his letter he enclosed a bill, asking me to endorse it. “There can be no mistake about my meeting it,” he said

in a postscript, with three black lines scored under each word; and taking it for granted there would be no mistake, I scratched my name on the back and sent it off. I thought no more of it, till one day—one Saturday it was, and Graham was with me—you brought me a letter. Do you remember a queer letter with a large red seal on a blue envelope, with the address beautifully written, in a hand like schoolboys use for their letters home before breaking-up day, which begins “Dear Parents?” I nodded. ‘Well, that was to say that Joe Hill had been called upon to meet the bill, and had run away; and that I was to pay the amount—forty-five pounds, Kate, hard money—and that if I didn’t proceedings would forthwith be taken against me; which threat was signed by a firm of solicitors living in the Old Jewry, out of Cheapside, in the City of London.’

He paused, produced a pocket-handkerchief like a flag, and wiped his forehead.

‘And you never told me of this!’ I exclaimed.

‘What would have been the use? Why should two people be made miserable, when one’s enough? Could you have paid the money had I told you? Graham, who was sitting opposite, met my eyes as they left the letter. They looked scared enough, I warrant. “That’s an attorney’s letter, Captain Howard,” he said. “It is,” said I, giving it him to read. He read it through like a man of business; no hanging over the words, but taking it all in like a breath; then handed it back. “How came you to get into this mess?” he asked. I told him. “And how are you going to get out of it?” he enquired. I told him I didn’t know. Indeed I was very plain spoken—plump and downright, like every man is when he’s taken clean aback with all sail set, for my spirits were high before that letter came. I had no pride. You don’t think of your ship’s trim when you’re likely to have the masts whipped out of her. I told him I couldn’t meet the bill. Then I grew dogged; blackguarded the lawyers, and cursed old Joe for a thief. And then I’m afraid



I got a bit maudlin. I thought of you, Kate.'

'And Mr. Graham lent you the money?'

'That he did!' he answered energetically; 'every farthing of it; brought me the forty-five pounds in new bank-notes. "I shall expect to be repaid, Captain," he said; "although you may be sure I shall be in no hurry. We'll not go to law about it. Pay me as you like or as you can—five shillings or a five pound note at the time, just as you've got it to spare. And now, as I consider I have done you a favour I dare say you won't mind doing me one: that is, not to let your daughter know a word of this affair!" Katie, I've kept my word; though I don't mean to say that the secret wouldn't have leaked out in the fullness of my gratitude if I hadn't guessed the pain it would have given you to have been told of this trouble, and the escape I've had of losing all my furniture, for I doubt,' looking around him, 'whether the house and all that's in it would fetch the worth of the bill.'

‘I am indeed surprised,’ was all I could say, after a lengthy pause.

‘And don’t you think Graham deserves to find a warm advocate in me, Kate?’

‘I am bound to say it was a noble action. How much do you still owe him, papa?’

‘Thirty pounds. I don’t suppose that he lent me this money altogether out of love for *me*. He had you more in his mind, I’ll wager. Wasn’t it delicate of him to insist on your not being told? Any other man would have been anxious for you to know it, as it would have furnished him with as strong a basis for his love-scheme as could be contrived. I like John Graham; I think his heart is a good one; and I am proud to think that he is in love with you, Kate.’

‘But how am I to know that he is in love with me?’ I asked.

‘Haven’t I told you?’

‘But why couldn’t he have told me himself?’

‘He means to tell you himself. He is

coming to dinner to-morrow. See that you get him something nice. His chief talk was about himself. Nothing egotistical, mind, but explanatory. He told me that he was head cashier in Jamieson's bank, with an income of one hundred and eighty pounds a year. And he tells me that next year old Jamieson is likely to make it two hundred. It isn't much ; but it's not contemptible. Its enough to begin with. He must be a thrifty fellow to have forty-five pounds saved out of such earnings to lend a friend. A thrifty fellow to have it, and a noble fellow to do it, *I* say. A hundred and eighty will give you at all events a joint three times a week, and pay as stiff a washing-bill as you can make out.'

'Is that all he said, papa?'

'Bless you, no. We were talking hard from the moment we left you to the moment he went away. Though he never said, "Captain Howard, will you allow Kate—always supposing that Kate is willing—to be my wife?" I knew quite well that was what he meant. As he had

opened his heart to me, I felt it right and proper I should open my heart to him. So I told him everything.'

'What did you tell him?'

'Why,' he answered, placidly smoothing the back of his hand, 'I told him first of all something that he knew—that I was a retired naval officer, with nothing but my half-pay to live on. D'ye see Kate, it's this half-pay that makes me thoughtful. While I live it's enough to keep body and soul together, but it'll stop when I stop, and then what's to become of my poor girl?'

I leant forward and kissed his hand, as I said,

'Don't talk like that, papa; if you do I shall begin to cry.'

'It's proper you should marry, Kate; and it's proper that you should marry as soon as you can. From what I have seen of Graham, mark me, he'll make you the best husband that ever woman had. If he asks you to marry him to-morrow—which it's just likely he'll do—and you tell him that you will, you have my leave

to say that he need not trouble to ask my consent, for it's given. He has means enough to support you pretty snugly, and he's as fine a looking fellow as ever I clapped my eyes on. I know that if I had to choose a man to take my place after I'm gone, he's the man I'd select.'

I was very grave now. Seeing that I made no answer, he went on.

'When you are married, you will come and live here. To be sure it's a pretty step from the bank, but he won't mind that. It will save him the expense of furnishing; and though the old furniture isn't worth much, it's all, my girl, that I shall have to leave you; and you may as well have it now as presently.'

'But he hasn't proposed yet, papa.'

'But he will, though. It's in him, and it'll come out to-morrow, mark me. Do you like him, Kate?' he asked suddenly.

'I don't know,' I answered. 'I have never thought about it.'

'Has he never made love to you at all?'

'Never.'

‘He’s mightily taken with you. Be sure of that. Old as I am, I’m sharp enough to see behind a man’s words ; and I could mark Love playing bo-peep behind his neat language, just as I’ve seen a robin-redbreast fluttering between gaps in a well-set hedge. Besides, look at his face, and that’ll tell you whether he’s sincere or not. A man with a face like that never acts but in earnest. He’s not one to be played with ; and I don’t think he’s one to play with other people.’

‘Still, why didn’t he come to me first ? It’s what every other man does when he makes love. One would think he wanted to marry you, and was coming to-morrow to ask my consent.’ I spoke with sincere gravity.

‘I respect the feeling that sent him to me first. He never came to ask my consent. He never spoke of marrying at all. But I could see what he meant. He’s an awfully sensitive man, that’s what he is. He wouldn’t like to have tried to separate us without first hearing whether I was willing to resign you. And

next he wished to let me into his history, that there might be no humbug anywhere. I honour him for his candour. He knew we should talk the matter over as we're now doing ; and he wanted to secure me a chance of giving you my advice and helping you to form your judgment. Had he proposed to you first, and had you accepted him, it would have been too late for me to have put in a word. He wanted to give the old man a chance, Kate. Isn't that true delicacy ?'

I supposed it was, but still I had my private opinion of the matter, and felt that I was the one to whom Mr. Graham should have first come.

'And there's something more yet,' pursued papa. 'He sets his private affairs before me, that he might save you the trouble of hearing them. He knew they would come better from me ; and that if I could see nothing to disapprove of in his statements, you couldn't. His principle's the right one, I say. What's usually done is cruel and stupid. When a woman has accepted

a man, and they've taught each other to think of themselves as husband and wife, in steps the old father and demands to be told all about the personal affairs of the man. If they're not satisfactory, "You won't do for my daughter, sir," says he. What's the consequence? The youngers have sworn to be true to one another, and rather than break their word they run away. That's what comes of putting the cart before the horse.'

I was silent. I quite comprehended my father's manner, and piercing the thin disguise, could see the sad thought in his heart which he was trying hard to repress. He had made up his mind to look upon me as married, and the misery of separation was strong upon him. Since my mother's death, which had happened when I was a very little girl, my father and I had never been apart for a day: he had married when a middle-aged man, and had quitted the sea at the same time. We had grown together, like the ivy and the oak. I was his pride. I was the light that irradiated his poverty and

rendered its vexations and its restraints endurable. The thought of his loneliness when we should be parted—the thought of his old true heart dark in the gloom of solitude—smote me like a pain. I rose and threw my arms around his neck.

‘Dearest papa!’ I cried, ‘I don’t want to leave you. I don’t want to belong to anybody but you. You will never be able to get on without your little girl—and what will she do without her old man?’

Caressing my cheek, he answered:

‘You will not leave me. If you marry John Graham, you will live here.’

‘Yes,’ I exclaimed, ‘but I shall not be wholly papa’s girl as I am now.’

‘Why not?’


‘Oh, I don’t know. Somebody else will claim me. I can always be a child when I am alone with you; but when I become a wife I shall feel an old woman, and you’ll take no pleasure in an old woman. You know what I mean? I can’t explain myself better. But

there *will* be a change : we shall not be as we were.'

Then suddenly recollecting the truth, I cried out,

'But he hasn't proposed yet !' .

'God knows, my child, I could ill bear to part with you,' said my father, smoothing my hair, for my cheek lay against his. 'At my time of life, when the old sunshine has left the heart, there seldom comes any new sunlight that'll brighten it. But I must not forget, nor must you forget either, my darling, that when I die you'll not only be alone in the world, but you'll be unprovided for. We've got both to think of the future. I'm no palavering old cant-box about marriage, although I'm a man ; and its men that suffer most by it. I say that marriage is the provision made by the world for women. It's not a refuge ; it's an estate. I want to see you married, and then I shall die comfortably. Why, if you had a hundred relatives, each owning a county of coal mines apiece, you shouldn't go to one of 'em. I'd rather see you



in a garret alongside a man that loved you, eating boiled mutton three times a week, and a rice pudding on Sundays—good may come out of *that*—than in receipt of two thousand a year from an aunt or cousin—for no good ever comes out of *that*. Faith, I would. It's dependence that cripples the mind. It's dependence that makes sycophants, those crawling colourless things which I take to be worse libels on human nature than monkeys.'

'It's very true,' said I.

'John Graham's the man I should choose for you. He has a good head and a strong arm. He'll propose to you to-morrow, mark me. Think it well over, Kate; you've got the night before you. When the matter's settled, then it'll be time enough to cry.'

When I got to my bedroom, I tried to think it over. A cheerful fire burned in the small grate; to it I drew a chair, and setting my subject before me, stedfastly and laboriously essayed to think it out. The wind roared in the chimney, and showers of mingled sleet and

hail lashed the panes. I could see my reflection in the looking-glass on the dressing-table. The pale light of the candle made the mirroring ghostly; it seemed as if my soul had left its body and sat by, dimly and still, to aid me in my communings with my heart.


It was idle to suppose that I was premature in my reverie. Papa had doubtless good reason to believe that Mr. Graham meant to propose to me to-morrow; and the whole affair, therefore, resolved itself into this question: Should he propose, what must I answer?

I tried very hard to find out my own feelings; I must do myself that justice; but, think as I would, my researches into my heart were being perpetually baffled and perplexed by such small obtrusive thoughts occurring as, What shall I wear to-morrow? What will he say when he proposes? How am I to act, should he offer to take my hand, or kiss me? So, before I had been very long before the fire, I found myself inquiring, not whether I loved him, whether I

should be safe in accepting him before I knew whether he was likely to make me happy ; but whether, among some odds and ends of flowers and ribbons I had put away, I could find something to wear in my hair to-morrow.

Have you ever watched a boy walking along a road ? I have, and I have remarked that he will do everything but walk straight forward ; he will jump over ditches ; kneel in sloughy banks, and peer with curious eyes for nests in the hedges ; he will throw stones at imperceptible birds, at impossible heights ; he will run to and fro athwart-wise, and rather than walk straight will walk backwards.

It was just so with my mind. I could not get it to face the destination to which I urged it. In vain I asked myself the question, Do I love him ? The answer was, That blue bow will match the coral earrings, and the black silk tunic will look well over the violet petticoat. Before long I found that I had left my chair, had turned the contents of the card-box topsy-turvy on the bed, and was busy in holding



flowers against my hair with one hand, whilst I held the candle up with the other.

Well, I can excuse my frivolity, and excuse it more willingly, knowing now how it was expiated. An admirer was something new to me. I knew that Mr. Graham had been taken by my face, and I was proud of the conquest. As I gazed at myself, something of the significance of my beauty began to dawn on me. I had long known that I was pretty; but my knowledge, now fed by the pride of conquest, was rendered far more self-complacent than it had ever been before. My large blue eyes flashed in the candle-light with a beauty of triumph that lent them a keener lustre; a quiet smile curled my lower lip into a pout; my complexion looked as transparent and pure as the petal of a lily; and my sweep of burnished hair arched my head with a pale golden nimbus of light.

Rapt in a species of self-worship, I paid no heed to the howling blasts, to the lashing hail, to the quick passage of time. The candle

burned low ; but still my busy hands fidgetted with ribbons and roses in my hair, whilst my busier thoughts robed me in my bridal dress—the apotheosis of silly girls like I was then—filled my ears with the melody of the organ, the voice of the priest, the hum of admiration from the crowded congregation. What a change had been effected in me, in a single evening. A look of maturity seemed suddenly to have come upon my face. I stood erect, dowered by a man's love with a sense of power and beauty. So rapidly had I constructed the castle, that it was perfected ere I was aware. I could not cease my joyous task of piling the airy structure to laboriously descend to digging that I might ascertain the capabilities of the soil in which I built. In imagination I had accepted John Graham before I knew that he loved me. In imagination I was his wife before he had offered himself as my husband. To dismantle the airy building reared by my fancy, to tumble it to pieces that I might erect it afresh on sure foundations, was impossible.

The strongest excitement of life was upon me ; the fatality of novelty was urging me. I did not know whether I loved John Graham ; I did not think of what answer I should give when he proposed to me. But had I reflected, I should easily have foreseen that when he asked me would I be his wife, I would have answered Yes, from no other reason than the reason that induces many women to make the same reply to the same question—the reason of not knowing better.

The flaring of the candle, as the flame caught the paper, caused me to look at my watch. It was twenty minutes to two—a horribly late hour, considering that I was usually in bed and asleep every night by eleven. Hastily sweeping my roses and ribbons into the card-box, I crept into bed ; but it was past three before I fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

I WAS awakened by the sunlight. I knew it was late by the complexion of the glare. I rose, looked at my watch, and found it was half-past ten. Was it possible! Irritated at not having been called, I hastily completed my toilette. Had papa gone to church, I wondered? I breathed upon the window-panes, thickly coated with ice, and effected a small circular thaw, through which I peeped. There was a sky of steel, cloudless, but menacing with its frozen serenity. I could see how deep the snow lay by marking the height it reached against the black trunks of the short line of firs at the bottom of the garden. I opened the door, and smelling the fumes of tobacco, knew

that papa had very wisely refrained from risking burial by a walk across the moors.

‘Harriet!’ I screamed, bursting into the kitchen, ‘what a provoking thing you are! how came you to let me sleep so late? Don’t you know there’s a gentleman coming to dinner to-day? He’ll be here at half-past one. Is the pie made?’

‘Yes, t’ pie’s made,’ said Harriet.

‘Have you saved me any breakfast?’

‘Ay,’ she responded; ‘here’s t’ eggs an’ bacon,’ and she drew a hot plate from the oven, which she handed me in a cloth. I hastened into the parlour, and having finished my breakfast, bade Harriet clear the table, whilst I tidied the room. But first I must salute papa. I stole into the study, kissed him on the baldest part of his head, and ran out. I had no time to talk. There was the dinner to look after; there was the parlour to set to rights; there was Harriet to scream into activity; and, chiefly, there was your humble servant to dress. Heavens! what an exciting time! No-

body but those who lead lonely, quiet lives, can tell what an extraordinary sensation excitement is. A woman holding a baby and shrieking for help from the top window of a burning house may possibly awaken some lively emotions in the minds of people accustomed to active lives and crowded streets; but I venture to assert that such excitement to them is insignificant compared to the excitement experienced by a provincial family of small means and few acquaintances, who, after five years of the stillest imaginable life, abruptly resolve to entertain the two neighbouring curates and five young ladies with a seed cake and tea, a little music, and a supper of sandwiches and home-made blanc-mange.

The morning passed rapidly enough, and at half-past twelve I went upstairs 'to dress.' Do not laugh at me! I was going to dress for a lover; and many young ladies exhibit a greater solicitude in their toilette, and take twice as long to complete it, when they dress only for the chance of getting a lover—and sometimes indeed

when there is no chance of getting a lover at all. My great anxiety to appear nice made me pay uncommon attention to details. I should be sorry to say how many different ways I arranged my hair before I got it exactly to my taste ; I must have been twenty minutes in settling my bow ; and I remember harbouring an almost malignant resentment against the stupid Lichendale dressmaker, who had made my bodice absurdly large about the waist and absurdly tight across the chest.

So wholly occupied indeed was I with my appearance, that I totally forgot the occasion for which I was dressing. It was not until I had given my hair the final touch, and had got a stiff neck in trying to see how my dress hung behind, that I began to wonder whether Mr. Graham would come after all. Would he venture across the moors with the snow four feet deep, and perhaps twenty feet deep in the marshes and hollows ? The frost had covered my circular patch on the window-pane, and I had to thaw another loophole before I could

see out. The name of Graham had awakened me to the consciousness that a crisis of my life was at hand. But it was twenty minutes past one, and much too late to begin to meditate now ; and to speak the truth I was in no meditative mood. There was a sort of dare-devil feeling within me, which might perhaps have meant an unlimited confidence in chance. ‘ Let things go as they will,’ thought I. ‘ There will be time enough to decide what to do when he has proposed.’ Muttering which to myself, with another lingering look at the sparkling eyes and brilliant face that laughed at me from the looking-glass, I went down stairs.

Papa was in the parlour, watching Harriet lay the cloth. He stared at me as I entered ; and stroking his chin with a rather mocking gesture, exclaimed,

‘ Why, Kate, you look something like to-day ! A full rig suits you ; it gives you a taut, saucy look ; and those streamers are the very colours you ought always to sail under.’

‘ Do you think blue becomes me, papa ?’ I

asked, taking a demure look at my bow in the mirror.

‘Rather. I never saw you look so well, Kate. You don’t mean to say you’d have taken all this trouble for a man you didn’t care for? What made you tell me last night that you weren’t in love with Graham?’

‘Did I? I don’t remember saying so. But if I did I suppose it was the truth.’

‘Steady your helm, old woman, and sail a little closer to the wind. You don’t want to tack with a soldier’s breeze. Speak the truth. Out with it, yellow hair! You’ve made up your mind to accept him, haven’t you?’

I glanced at him shyly, and hung my head.

‘Don’t bother, papa,’ I answered, trying to speak pettishly.

‘Kate,’ he exclaimed, with sudden earnestness, ‘I have told you my opinion of Graham, and I want now to repeat again what I said last night. I don’t remember ever meeting a man in my life whom I would more willingly select as my substitute. But, however you may act, I


have prayed the Almighty will direct you for the best. It's a wedding I should like to see, because I can still keep you after you're married; and your presence will be even a greater comfort to me than it is now, for I shall feel that happen what will you're provided for.'

I was looking towards the window as he spoke, and was about to express my doubt of Graham appearing at all that day, when I saw him turn the corner of the hill.

'Here he is, papa!' I cried; and my heart begun to beat so rapidly that I feared I should have fallen. A sudden nervousness, accompanied with a tremulousness about the mouth and great coldness of hands, seized me. 'Do you receive him!' I cried; and without further speech I bounded upstairs to my bedroom. Just as I gained it I heard Graham's rattling knock upon the door. 'There is no nervousness there,' thought I. 'How absurd I am to tremble in this fashion. If *he* isn't frightened, why should I be?' But for some minutes I continued shivering so, that I

had to walk about the room to regain circulation and composure. I then listened at the top of the staircase. I could hear the growling murmur of men's voices; and knowing by the sound that the parlour door was closed, slipped into the kitchen to get warm and calm before I should enter. How earnestly I trusted papa wouldn't tell Mr. Graham of my nervousness! It would make me look so foolish and weak-minded, I thought. With my back to the fire I stood watching Harriet, until the process of 'dishing up' was so near at hand that it became absolutely necessary for me to put in an appearance. Firmly collecting my courage, as a rider collects his reins before a leap, I passed through the kitchen and entered the parlour.

Mr. Graham rose at once. He approached me with an air of the most deferential admiration, and placed a chair for me fronting the fire. I dared not meet his eyes, for I dreaded the blushes which I knew his steady gaze would excite. My father alternately looked from him to me. There was a dead silence, which I



tremulously disturbed by remarking that it was very cold. Having made this leak, the conversation soon began to flow. I quickly perceived in papa's manner a predetermined air of jollity, which certainly at the commencement sat very awkwardly upon him. When, after a short lapse of time, I ventured to peep at Mr. Graham's face, I remarked that the expression was calm, almost hard, with an air of resolution.

During the dinner I was not very communicative. My old knack at chattering had wholly deserted me ; I sat with my eyes downcast, eating little, listening keenly. If, however, I felt embarrassed, my embarrassment was purely of my own contrivance. I did not often look at Mr. Graham, but saving the moments when he addressed me I am pretty sure he hardly looked in my direction. As the repast drew towards its close I grew more venturesome. I was satisfied at first with a few fugitive glances ; afterwards I got into rather a prolonged stare. I found myself admiring him—

admiring his robust form, his broad brows, darkened by the shadow of his raven hair parted in the centre, his slightly aquiline nose, carved with severe precision at the nostrils, his swarthy complexion, which gave him the air of a man who had passed many years in travel; and studying, but without admiration, his dark, inscrutable eyes, in which burned an inexplicable ray, as though the dusky irids veiled the glare of a soul lurid with passions. 'He *is* handsome,' I thought; and here I stopped; my mind in those days was too small to admit more than this; it took little to fill it, and when it was full my vanity whispered that I knew all that could or need be known.

We did not prolong our conversation after dinner; for papa and Mr. Graham withdrew to the study, to smoke as usual, and I was left alone. I helped Harriet to clear away, and took a book, which I am not sure that I did not hold inverted. I will not deny that I felt, on the whole, rather uneasy. I had always been of opinion that a proposal of marriage

should come upon a girl like a sort of pleasant surprise. Its real relish lies in its total unexpectedness. I felt that I, at all events, should have enjoyed the proposal much more (when it came) had papa not obliged me to expect it. And then again, would it not occur to Mr. Graham, as it had occurred to me, that the whole thing very much resembled a play, of which the parts had been rehearsed and learnt beforehand? Why *had* papa told me anything about it? and why, in the name of goodness, if Mr. Graham were really in love with me, had he not come to me at once and pleausurably amazed me by the totally-unexpected disclosure of his feelings? Men, thought I, are, at the best, but miserable bunglers wherever the heart is concerned. If the conventional custom could be reversed—could women be allowed to make love and propose—what a much more gracious and poetical affair—what a delightful idyl, in short—would they make of courtship.

I doubt if twenty minutes could have elapsed

before I heard the study door open. There was a faint knock, and Mr. Graham entered alone. He paused at the doorway.

‘I see you are reading,’ he said. ‘If I enter I fear I shall be proving an intruder.’

‘I am not reading, Mr. Graham,’ I answered, shutting the book, at which I had not once glanced, and placing it on the table. ‘Pray come in.’ What else could I have said?

He closed the door, and advanced with his lofty air to the fire. There was a chair near me; he took it. If I had reason before to feel irritated with the dressmaker for making my dress so tight across the chest, I had doubly reason now. My heart throbbed so violently that I really thought its pulsations would be perceptible; and it throbbed all the more because it was strangled by the tight bodice.

I felt very cold, very pale, very nervous, very hysterical.

‘Captain Howard has just told me,’ he began, in a voice low and even musical, but withal stately and unimpassioned, ‘that he has re-

peated my conversation with him yesterday to you.'

'It is true,' I answered, making a prodigious effort to prevent my faltering voice from fainting into a whisper ; 'and what is more, he also made me acquainted for the first time with the truly noble manner in which you rescued him from a difficult and critical situation.'

He simply bowed, with a smile.

'If I have not thanked you before it is because I did not know of your goodness,' I went on, still struggling with my voice. 'My interest being identical with my father's, I hope you will think me no unappreciative recipient of your kindness.'

'I am grateful to you for your thanks,' he answered ; 'and if I do not disclaim them, it is because I believe they may help me in advocating the cause for which I am here to plead. I only fear that you will think my conduct irregular. Do I embarrass you by what might seem an unfair precipitance?'

Had papa been stupid enough to tell him

that I was piqued at his not having come to me first? To a variety of other emotions that of dismay was now added. Had my life depended on an answer, I must have kept silence.

He waited, thinking, perhaps, I might speak. Then in a voice yet more softened, went on.

‘I must at least claim your appreciation of an honest wish not to cause either your father or yourself the slightest pain or embarrassment. I warmly respect his manly heart; I admire his generous spirit; and I appreciate his cordial sentiments. I have tried to do all the justice in my power to his love for you, remembering that you are his only child, his only companion, by endeavouring to ascertain whether the tree would be injured by my removing its blossom. Do you blame me?’

‘I don’t blame you,’ I answered, hardly knowing what I said.

‘You must have wondered, Kate,’ he continued, his voice growing slowly impassioned, whilst the sound of my name dyed my cheeks with an uncontrollable blush, ‘at my constant

visits here. Did you believe that it was only your father's society that brought me so regularly through nipping winds and snow?'

'I always thought you came to hear his stories,' I said.

He was silent. Though I did not look at him, I could feel that his penetrating eye was upon my face; doubtless charged with that sceptical light which I sometimes encountered when I had said something very simple.

'You could not have thought that,' he remarked suddenly.

'But I did though,' said I, defiantly.

'Did you not guess that you were the fascination——?' He paused.

I shook my head.

'I hadn't conceit enough to guess it,' I said.

I thought he was going to leave his seat. Instead he brought his chair a little nearer to me, near enough for his knees to touch my dress.

'Kate,' he commenced plaintively, 'when you know me better, you will pronounce me

one of the most anomalous beings ever fashioned by nature. Unhappily for me I am endowed with a stubborn character. Good-natured people would call it determination ; but I have no wish to soften the name. Term it pride, sensitiveness, timidity ; but I have discovered that my deepest impulses are just those that I cannot express. They move other men to tears or laughter or protestations. But they harden my face, they freeze and block up the outlets whence they should issue. This is a necessary preamble, Kate,' he exclaimed, clasping his hands, whilst he lowered his face to a level with mine. 'I have loved you with a passion which would have made the conduct of others as transparent as a piece of glass through which the sunlight shines. Yet I have never been able to convey my love. I have watched you narrowly, often enough trusting you had detected the truth. A sudden flushing of your cheek, a sudden lustre in your eyes, have sometimes made me hope you had guessed the secret. But I was soon disabused.'

I moved my foot restlessly to and fro on the hearthrug. There was something in his voice that was quickening my pulse; something in his manner that was giving life to fancies which I had never thought his love would have begotten. He took my hand; passively it lay in his; and whilst he spoke he caressed it incessantly, sometimes raising it to his lips, sometimes smoothing it with his fingers as he might have smoothed the plumage of a bird.

‘All this strikes you as very abrupt, very unexpected, does it not?’ he asked. ‘I could feel no surprise if it did.’

I murmured something, I hardly know what. He held my hand tightly; he was drawing me to him; I did not resist.

‘I do not think,’ he said, ‘that a man need love less truly and strongly because he has no facility of avowing his love. He should love more strongly; for love is always strengthened by repression. The faithless love is always the love that has leaped quickly into being—dying

before the true and tender summer of life has come, like all early flowers die—it being a love that thought has not strengthened, that dreams have not quickened, that patience has not shaped, nor faith consecrated. . . . Darling, will you be my wife?’

I met his eyes. They shone with startling brilliancy. His face was colourless; but there was a look upon it of wild passion and a tameless nature. But my immature vision permitted me to take no note of this. Without heeding the voice in my heart demanding to know whether I loved him or not; abandoned by judgment; swept away in the storm of emotion that had burst upon me in the warmth of his words, the appeal of his caresses, I suffered him to draw me with a tight nervous folding to his breast, and to infer the answer he sought from my passive form, my closed eyes, my red cheeks which I had buried from his sight upon his shoulder.

For an interval we remained so. I heard his accents, but hardly his language, in my ear.

At last I got up, and then he released me. But with what a triumphant look he regarded me. He must have thought the conquest a fine one to look so victorious!

Oh! he seemed very proud of me; and yet I couldn't help thinking that his pride was of an odd, suggestive kind; the pride I am inclined to think with which a Stamboul merchant, or a South Carolina planter, regards the beautiful slave he has just purchased. Adoration indeed might have been in his glance; but his mein suggested rather the enamoured master than the tender lover.

I heard the door opened; I turned; papa was in the room. He looked nervous and pale. What brought him in so opportunely I don't know; perhaps he thought that we had had time enough to make love in; perhaps, judging from Mr. Graham's character, he guessed that the crisis would not be very long in being brought about.

He was certainly impatient to know the result, and I hastened to satisfy his curiosity by

throwing my arms about his neck and bursting into tears.

‘Kate has consented to be my wife, Captain Howard,’ said Mr. Graham, briefly. ‘Have we your congratulations and consent?’ He extended his hand.

‘That you have, and my blessing too!’ cried hearty papa, wringing the proffered hand with a vehemence that must have made John Graham wince. ‘What I say is, may God bless you both! May He make you a comfort to one another, and long spare you to keep each other happy. John Graham, you have got a good girl for a bride,’ he added, with a sob in his voice. ‘She’ll be sunshine to you in your struggles, and an ornament to you when you’ve won the battle of life, and become a rich man. Kiss me, Kate. What do you want to cry for? Leave widows to do that when they’re asked to marry again, or the men that propose to ’em after they’re accepted.’

He gently raised me, led me to a chair, and going over to Mr. Graham, shook hands again.

‘This is no time for tears, is it, John?’

John smiled.

They sat down, and then commenced an animated discussion, in which after a little I found myself taking an active part. The proposition from my father that after our marriage we should live in the cottage, which he affirmed with great energy would no longer be his after his daughter was married, was at first pretty warmly opposed by Mr. Graham. He argued that when a man marries he ought to provide his wife with a home of his own finding; he added that he was in a position to furnish a house for himself, and entreated to be permitted to do so. Papa would not hear of it.

‘I tell you what it is, John,’ said he, ‘if my poor wife was living I wouldn’t be so hard upon you. I’m no advocate for making a Noah’s ark of a house, by forcing different families to live together; I know pretty well what that means; the cat teases the mouse, the monkey worries the cat, the ass disturbs the owl. There’s no mating among different species. But in this

case, mark you, there'll be no one here to interfere. Here's a house ready to hand, furnished snugly enough for the present, and it would be a sin to let it go out of false delicacy or unnecessary pride. You don't fear me, do you? Bless you! Kate will tell you you won't know I'm in the place except when I light my pipe.'

I saw Mr. Graham interrogatively watching me.

'I should like to remain with papa,' I said.

'*Soit!*' he muttered. But he still, though with increased hesitation, continued to oppose us. He suffered himself, however, to be overruled at last, graciously capping his dilatory acquiescence by saying 'that whatever increases Kate's happiness must increase mine.'

The afternoon passed; the evening came; Mr. Graham rose to depart. We had been talking incessantly, and on matters of such vital interest to the colloquists as to absorb their attention, to the exclusion of all consideration as to the passage of time. It was now dark. The glowing

core of coal gave a ruby radiance to the room, but out of doors it was dusk, and I could see the interior of the parlour, with the gleaming fire-play on the walls and the outline of our figures phantasmally reflected in the dark window-panes.

I rose to look at the night. The sombre deep sky was flaked over with pulsating stars; the snow stretched ghastly and dim to a near but vague horizon. I could discern the outline of the gaunt row of trees, looking like frozen sentinels upon the white plain, backed by the shrouded height of hills.

‘How was the snow when you came along?’ asked my father.

‘Deep,’ answered Mr. Graham, swathing his neck in the comforter I had brought him, whilst I stood by with his great-coat, ‘but hard upon the surface. It’s easier walking that it seems. The nipping wind has coated it like a macadamised road.’

‘I think I’ll walk with you, John,’ said my father.

‘Don’t,’ I entreated. ‘It’s too cold for you—you’ll be frozen. Mr. Graham is used to it; besides, you haven’t his strength.’

Mr. Graham whispered :

‘Why will you call me *Mr.* Graham?’

‘John, then,’ I answered. He made a movement as if to kiss me; but, papa being present, discreetly refrained.

‘Kate,’ he said, in a low tone, ‘you are mine, are you not?’

‘I am yours now, John.’

‘Wholly and heartily, darling?’

‘Wholly and heartily.’

He pressed my hand, and then turned from me.

‘Don’t think of venturing out, Captain Howard!’ he cried, seeing that papa was gazing meditatively out of window; ‘you mustn’t leave Kate to-night!’

‘Yes, I’ll go,’ answered papa. ‘I haven’t been out all day, and shall enjoy a short walk. I’ll light my pipe, and wrap myself well up. I’ve got something more to say to you, John, as we go along.’

‘Oh!’ I exclaimed, ‘you mustn’t dream of going, papa!’

‘I shall only just turn the hill, Kate,’ he cheerily replied. And then, coming close to me, whispered, ‘He’ll be pleased with the attention. I sha’n’t be ten minutes gone.’

He passed into the hall, and proceeded to roll himself rapidly in a double-caped cloak.

‘Let him have his own way, Kate,’ said Mr. Graham, following him with his eye; ‘I’ll take care of him. I may come often to see you now, mayn’t I?’

‘As often as you like,’ I answered, made miserable by papa’s resolution, and wishing he would remain at home.

‘Kate,’ he continued, ‘your acceptance of me has made me feel very happy. I hope I properly appreciate my girl’s love; I hope I rightly know the value of the family jewel which I told you yesterday I had found. You will let me know soon when we may be married?’

‘John, my hearty!’ cried my father from the hall; ‘is your pipe filled?’

‘No!’ answered John; ‘it’s in the study.’

‘I’ll fill it for you,’ said my father.

‘Be sure and don’t let papa accompany you too far,’ I entreated. ‘He’s a hale, robust man enough; but the blood in old veins is easily chilled, and of late he has complained of a sort of numbed feeling about the head.’

‘I’ll not let him go farther than the bend of the hill,’ was the answer.

Papa waited for him in the hall. In a few seconds the lighting of their pipes filled the place with tobacco-smoke; the door was opened, a keen air penetrated my bones and sent me shuddering into the parlour, from which I had protruded my head. ‘Keep me a cup of tea, Kate!’ cried papa, as he went out. The hall door was slammed, and, shivering with the cold, I returned to the ruddy fire.

CHAPTER IV.


I STIRRED the fire to make it blaze ; I did not like the sombre radiance of the flameless glow. It filled the black panes with phantoms ; it gave life to weird shapes that stirred upon the wall, that crawled upon the ceiling. I pushed a stool to the fender and seated myself. With my eyes fixed upon the quaint outlines that pulsated, flashed, and faded in the red embers, I fell into deep thought.

He had proposed to me ; I had accepted him. I was virtually his wife. What did this mean ?

Did it not mean that by taking this man's name I was to become a portion of his being, that I was to follow him whitherso'er he should lead me, that I was to describe the large

or narrow orbit that he circled in, controlled by him, shaped by him, darkened or illuminated by him?

As the sleeper starts in his perturbed dreams, so started I in my reflections; for now that I had closed with his offer I began to examine it. I asked myself if I loved, and listened with strained attention to the answer; but none came. I said to myself, If I do not love, why did I accept him? but still my heart was voiceless. To my keen and eager questioning my soul was deaf. Had I made a mistake in not rejecting his proposal? Had I not committed a grievous error in suffering my vanity or my love of novelty to take the place of my judgment; and to endure his embrace, to reciprocate his caresses, to pronounce my own fate, without a long and close examination of the hieroglyphs carved by passion and nature on his face—without stedfastly watching the heart whose written characters I might in time have perused, and whose full meaning I might in time have mastered?




The events of that Sunday's afternoon seemed to have ripened my judgment to a degree of maturity at which, in the still lonely life I was leading, it would have taken a long time to arrive. I had become suddenly possessed of the power of thinking logically. I could interrogate with earnestness ; but though I could elicit no replies from my heart, to the responses of my judgment I could listen with keen appreciation. The obligation to thought, thus abruptly imposed, was imperative ; I could not evade it. Imagination, hope, doubt, fear, had seized me with inexorable grasp, and violently compelled me to gaze upon the truth. Vigilantly I scrutinised it ; distinct were its affirmations. It told me that I had acted with incautious precipitance. It denounced my vanity. It could find nothing to commend ; for I could not even plead the excuse of wishing to gratify my father by my hasty acceptance of Mr. Graham's hand. But it would not deprive me of hope ; it would not break me down with pitiful forebodings. I knew nothing ill of his character ; papa

had tried to make me know much that was good, and upon what was good Truth bade me fix my gaze. 'He loves you,' it whispered; 'be sure of that. Characters like his are never urged by idle promptings; they are the victims of fact, not of fancy; and not until fact has been hardened and strengthened by long and well-nurtured growth do they yield to its solicitations and obey its impulses. Mr. Graham's love for you is a fact; upon it you may confidently take your stand, fearing the crumbling of no frail fabric, but strong in the confidence of a powerful support.'

'If this be so,' I exclaimed, 'I have nothing to fear. If his love be true, from it will radiate the beams that soothe, that warm, and cherish. I will doubt nothing. I will silence my untimely self-reproaches. If my future is to be sunny, I will bless my fate and enjoy the gracious light. If it is to be sombre . . .'

I raised my eyes to the window. A longer interval than ten minutes had elapsed, and papa




had not yet returned. The wind had risen : it came creeping down the hill with a long and lamentable plaint. I approached the window and peered out. Clouds, looking portentous and heavy, swept in gathering groups across the sky, burying star after star in their thick pall, and hurrying away to the south. No shape stirred upon the snow—no shadow disturbed its cold, death-like purity. I heaped more coals upon the fire ; I lighted the lamp and closed the shutters, robing the window with the thick damask curtains. I resumed my seat, but found I could not rest. A presentiment, having no form, evading determination, agitated my heart, accelerated my pulse. I rose and walked about the room, pausing at intervals to listen. Oh, for the sound of his hand upon the latch ! Oh, for the echo of his cheery call !

As I paced restlessly to and fro, old legends I had heard of these moors stirred in my mind and took shape in my memory. One legend in particular came upon me, strong and tenacious.

It told of a woman who sat watching for her

husband's return from Lichendale. It was such a night as this—bleak, dim, bound in an iron frost. Her baby lay upon her knee, moaning at intervals in unison with the wind that sobbed in the chimney. Her husband was a bad man—drunken, passionate, brutal. Whilst she watched, the hours stole on ; the night fell ; the snow deepened to the fitful storm. Still she held her post. Presently she saw a human shape coming across the moors, marking a weird outline on the shrouded back-ground. It approached the house—it entered the door. Thinking it her husband, she rose meekly to salute him. But her terror held her dumb ; for the shape was that of a stranger. There was a dark red line upon his naked throat, and all his face was stone dead. With glassy eyes the shape watched the woman in silence, then addressed her. It told her that her husband was a murderer ; that he had robbed him of his life and money, leaving his little ones starving and fatherless. Man's laws could not reach him, for he had fled ; but the law of God demanded this



expiation. Saying this, the shape snatched the babe from the mother's arms, and fled into the night. The mother followed, shrieking for her child. And it was long believed that on desolate winter nights the two figures—the phantom of the wife pursuing the ghost of her husband's victim—were to be sometimes seen speeding with feet that left the snow unstained across the moors, while the blast blew laden with the wailing of the babe and the piteous entreaties of the mother.

What had brought this wild tale into my head? I could not tell. I grew frightened at my solitude, and, passing through the hall, entered the kitchen. Harriet sat at the table, with her large-rimmed spectacles on nose, and a flaring candle between her and a greasy folio Bible. A solid core of glowing peat and coal in the broad chimney, reflected in crimson flakes and flames in rows of polished brass and pewter saucepans and covers, filled the room with a deep and delicate radiance. The uncarpeted boards, the table, the dresser, were clean to

purity. A primitive high-backed chair, with capacious seat, comfortably cushioned, fronted the fire. In it I seated myself.

Harriet was used to these visits from me, and took no notice of this one. I glanced at the clock, and saw that papa had been gone more than half an hour.

‘Harriet,’ I cried, ‘papa has accompanied Mr. Graham just a short distance to Lichendale. He promised to be back in ten minutes. What makes him so late, Harriet?’

‘I canna’ tell,’ she answered without, raising her head. Harriet was one of those servants whose devotion, though admirable, does not quite compensate one for the trying doggedness with which they resent the least imaginary grievance. Evidently she had not forgotten my conduct of the day before; but I was too much troubled to show any impatience now. Approaching her, I exclaimed,

‘Harriet, I am miserable! Do you think anything could have happened to papa?’

‘We’re all in t’ hands o’ t’ Loord,’ she sul-

lenly answered, with her strong North-country accent.

I could have boxed her ears at this, but stood too badly in need of her companionship. The time slipped by in silence. I looked again at the clock ; it was five minutes to six, and papa had left at five. An uncontrollable agitation was possessing me. In spite of the heated kitchen and my proximity to the fire, I shivered. I strove with my fears by arguing that an earnest conversation might have seduced him further than he had intended to walk. I recalled Graham's promise to look after him, and tried to extract comfort from that. In vain. Terror, sharp and keen, smote my heart. I passed from the kitchen, opened the hall door, and, my teeth chattering, gazed with staring eyeballs, listened with a hearing strained to pain. The stars were gone. Where they had shone a thick curtain of cloud now extended. The wind through the iron boughs of the gaunt fir-trees made a sound like the breaking of a distant surge boiling upon a

strand. No shadow stirred. I closed the door, returned to the kitchen, and burst into tears. Too deaf to hear my sobs, Harriet did not heed me. 'God grant that nothing has happened to him!' I prayed, clasping my hands. 'Why did I not prevent him from daring the dangers of those cruel moors!'

Still he would come! For many minutes, which rolled slowly as hours over me, I sat listening. Unable at length to bear my terror, I shook Harriet by the shoulder.

'Close that book!' I cried. 'Do you not see how I am suffering? Papa may have lost his way—perhaps he is lying now, buried in the snow, dying or dead! Do you hear me, I say?—Dead!' My voice was raised to a shriek. She closed her book, turned to me, and slowly rose from her chair.

'You needn't be afeard,' she said. 'He knows his way, and 'll coom back saafe. Why, you're cryin', Mees Kate!'

I buried my hands in my face, moaning. Then I started up and ran to the hall door, and

again gazed and listened. The wind wailed—the snow lay shadowless.

‘I must go and seek him, Harriet!’ I cried. ‘I must take the lantern and look for him. He may yet be saved. He cannot be far off; my heart will burst if I remain waiting like this!’

She heard my voice; she marked my mad, wild look, and threw her arms about me, pouring a wild volley of expostulations in her strange jargon against the folly and madness of my attempting such a search. She told me I should lose myself in the snow; that even should I regain the house I would die of the fever that must follow such an insane exposure. I struggled and fought to liberate myself; but she held me firmly. I scratched her; in my craziness I tried to bite her. But the old woman’s strength of limbs and faithfulness of heart were proof against my efforts. I heard her imploring; I heard the scraping of our feet as we swayed upon the floor. Suddenly her voice waxed faint and became silent, her grasp weakened, the light disappeared—a heavy

blackness, like an overwhelming weight, fell upon my head and crushed me to the ground. One heavy sob I gave, and then I lay a dead weight in her arms. My terror, my passion, coupled with the strong emotional ordeal I had been made to pass through during the afternoon, had overmastered me : I had fainted.

I recovered my consciousness amid sighs and sobs. A deep black pall obscured my vision, barred with great red columns. It seemed as if I were awakening from a horrible nightmare. The blackness grew illuminated ; the red pillars died out ; I opened my eyes, but my ears were deafened with a noise like the thunder of billows. Soon this, too, waxed faint, and I looked about me. I was lying on the floor in the kitchen, my head pillowed on a cushion, my body protected by a shawl. Harriet knelt near me, holding a basin which, to judge from the smell it diffused, held vinegar. My brow was damp ; my form seemed stiff with cold. The moment I saw Harriet the full tide of memory rushed in upon me.

‘Has papa come yet?’ I inquired faintly.

‘Now doant be troubled, ma tear,’ said the old woman, who had gathered my meaning from the movement of my lips; ‘ye’ll be better in bed now, Mees Kate. I ha’ filled t’ warming-pan, which ’ll make ye snoog; for ty body’s coolder nor t’ snaw, ma tear.’

I knew by this that papa had not yet come. I shivered with a long, sick, shuddering sigh. Feeling too weak and faint to rise, I could only moan, while the hot tears trickled over my face and soaked the cushion.

‘Coom, Mees Kate; coom t’ bed—if ye canna walk I’ll carry ye.’

I shook my head; I was not ungrateful for her attention; but I wanted to be left alone—to lie there, and to remain until papa should come. I essayed to tell her this; she partly understood me, but continued urging me to go to bed. As, however, I gave no further answer than a shake of the head, she presently desisted, seating herself in the arm-chair and watching me with the steady unwinking

gaze that belongs to the two extremes of life.

Hollowly ticked the sullen Dutch clock ; dolefully wailed the wind as it lamented its ceaseless unrest in dismal dirges ; ruddily glowed the high-piled fire. I lay with every fibre in my body strained in my torturing effort to hear. The falling of a cinder, the movement of Harriet's foot, jarred upon my nerves and gave me acute pain. Often I raised my head from the cushion, imagining that I heard the sound of voices. My tears had ceased to flow ; but my eyeballs burned, and a hand of ice had grasped my heart.

Presently, Harriet, remembering that I had had no tea, rose to prepare some. I entreated her not to move. The slightest stir grated harshly, and blunted the sustained keenness of of my hearing ; but she did not hear my almost inaudible protest, and, too weak to raise my voice to the requisite pitch, I fell back silent.

The clock told me that papa had been three hours absent. Each tick of the pendulum

seemed like a drop of blood dripping from my dying hope. I had tried to believe that he had gone so far on the way to Lichendale that Mr. Graham had refused to allow him to return, and had carried him the whole distance, where he would probably remain the night. But my judgment refused to admit the suggestion. It was most unlikely that papa could be prevailed on to traverse the whole extent of moors, and unlikely he would delay his return, knowing well what sufferings his absence would entail on me.

Harriet handed me a cup of tea. I raised myself into a sitting posture, and drank the hot draught mechanically; then, struggling to my feet, sank into the arm-chair.

What was that? I clutched the arms of the chair and half rose. I had heard a voice—a grumbling bass note had struck my ear. ‘Hark!’ I cried. There came a loud peal on the door which drove my heart into a maddening play. I staggered to my feet and rushed to the hall. I threw the door wide open. Two


men stood before me—dark shapes muffled to the throat. Between them they bore a recumbent form, with drooping head and lifeless arms, whose fingers trailed the snow.

A supernatural calm gave sap and sinew to my being.

‘We foond him lyin’ wi’ his face deep in t’ snow, by t’ corner o’ yond’ hill,’ said a gruff voice.

‘Bring him in,’ I said ; ‘he is my father.’

Staggering beneath their frozen burden, they entered the hall and bore him to the kitchen, laying him on the cushion and the shawl. Harriet, with blanched cheeks and trembling with horror, yet preserved her presence of mind ; and hastening to the parlour, returned with some brandy, which she endeavoured to administer with a spoon. Idle effort ! The teeth were locked with a tightness that defied her attempts to separate them. I unswathed his neck, removed his collar, and heating my hand chafed his throat and cheeks ; I breathed upon his face ; I rubbed his arms with the



strength of despair. He lay like a statue of marble, colourless and serene, with a frozen smile upon his lips, and a look of stubborn wonder on his face.

The men who had brought him turned to depart. They had done all they could ; what need now to stay ? That dead body, that pale child whose tearlessness made the expression of anguish upon her face pitiful beyond the conceptions of tragedy, formed no sight to linger over. They slipped noiselessly away : I was hardly sensible of their departure.

We partially undressed him ; we rolled him in a hot blanket, and pillowed his poor head before the roaring fire. I watched him as he lay in his unutterable calm. Those stiff hands but a short time ago were twined about my neck ; that silent tongue was addressing me with endearing words ; that still heart was a pulsating world of goodness, of love, of tenderness ; a world of sunshine and peace, with myself as its solitary occupant. The sense of my loss—the dead affection never to be revived,

the noble presence never to be restored, the severed tie never to be united—struck me full and blighting. I fought with the crushing darkness that once again descended; but it triumphed, it overwhelmed me, it hurled me to the floor lifeless as the form by which I had swooned.

CHAPTER V.

THE contemplation of your past life often resembles the contemplation of a broad far-reaching landscape. In the remote distance the dim hills meet the sky and faint upon the ether; there are tracts green and sunlighted, and tracts yellow and arid; over all is the alternation of shadow and shine; and portions of the scene are shrouded in the tresses of weeping clouds, and portions veiled by white crawling mists impervious to the light.

Over the portion of my life I have now reached hangs a veil, beneath which I, indeed, discern shapes, and through which I hear sounds; but the outlines are vague, and I follow their movements with difficulty; and the

sounds strike dull and confused, so that I cannot gather their full meaning.

A stagnation of feeling, an indifference to life, a sombre despair, a mental blindness that deprived me of the will or the power to attempt to penetrate the future, succeeded my father's death. That my heart should have sustained the shock without breaking was to me the dull wonder of those days—the sole feeling that seemed to stir me to reflection. John Graham was often with me, seeking to soothe me after his own fashion. But there were periods when I could have well dispensed with his solicitude. At the same time I could not remain insensible to the tender courtesy of his manner, the delicacy of his attentions, which not even the selfishness of grief could always make me regard as intrusive. He was obviously anxious that I should regard him as the companion that had been chosen for me by my poor father; and perhaps looking upon our love as an affair long since settled, avoided the language of the lover, and addressed me altogether as

the orphan needing and claiming what tenderness the heart held which he had instructed me to think my own.

When we had first met I had bitterly reproached him for the non-fulfilment of his promise to take care of papa. He was wholly ignorant of my loss when he had called ; and heard me tell the story with a pale and petrified face, in which I fancied I discovered more of wonder than of grief. Then he entered upon his own vindication. He solemnly affirmed that my father had not walked above a hundred yards with him beyond the hill. ‘He wanted to accompany me farther,’ he continued, ‘but I firmly refused. He talked incessantly as we went along, and was in the midst of some animated remarks when I interrupted him by saying I could not allow him to proceed another step. We halted ; and he kept me talking at least ten minutes before he left me. The wind had risen ; I was anxious to get home, for I had a two-mile walk before me, and the clouds that went sweeping over the

sky warned me of a gathering snow-storm. He shivered a little as we shook hands, and I stood watching him some moments to see that he took the straight road. He walked direct towards his house; and feeling sure that he would reach it safely, I struck forward on my own march home.'

This story being told, I found no further cause for reproach. It seemed wonderful, indeed, that papa should have died almost within sight of the cottage; but the evidence of the two men who had found him, and the testimony of the doctor as to the cause of his death, wholly explained away the apparent mystery that surrounded the accident. In fine weather the road, or rather pathway, leading to our house, skirted the base of the hill—a thin, trodden line, veining the heather. The base of the hill, however, was sunk several feet deeper than the path, being half-circled by a sort of natural fosse, which the snow had effectually choked and brought level to the plain. With his mind probably full of the topics he


had been discussing, papa had absently approached the base of the hill, walked into the fosse, and sunk at once to the waist. Already chilled to the bones by his walk, his limbs were quickly numbed; the more he struggled the deeper he sank; his face was buried by his efforts to extricate himself, and in this posture he was soon suffocated. So he was found by the two men who had walked that morning to Hunton, and were returning to Lichendale.

Well I remember, when this story was told me, the keen pang of remorse that struck me for not having insisted on searching for him. Bitterly I reviled Harriet for her interference. It was certain that I should have found him: and at the time when I had resolved to look for him it was not impossible but that life might not have been extinct.

In time, however, my young nature triumphed over my despair; thawing my spirit, stiffened and stilled by the sudden loss; slowly irradiating my heart, and tenderly tinting life again with the soft bloom, shaping it with the

harmonious outlines which had been wanting before to the grim, gaunt shape my misery had depicted it. Mr. Graham's visits grew more frequent; and as my stricken spirits began to revive, I found these visits grew more welcome. He was my only visitor, my only companion; and as the time would draw near for him to come, I found myself awaiting him with a kind of expectation I could not always define.

I owe him, at least, one debt of gratitude; for he saved me from that withering sense of loneliness which follows the death of an only parent. Hope had now raised her drooping lids, and was looking abroad for something to achieve, something to live for. The impulses of youth were stirring, and clamouring for relief from the weird monotony of those solitary days. And the instinct of faith that never dies in a woman's heart, was asserting its being for something to rely on, something to trust to. Mr. Graham filled a void. His presence was no realisation of love; but it was better than a dream, more vital than an idealism. I was



filled, indeed, with no sober certainty of waking bliss; but I was animated with a sense of security, gladdened by the thought that I had a friend whom I could trust, and a lover whose sincerity I need not doubt. Mad dream!—vain confidence! A dream merging fast into a nightmare—a confidence leading fleetly to betrayal!

The spring came; the snow thinned along the moors; my wedding-day was fixed. I had struggled to defer it. The implication of happiness suggested by a marriage-service I felt would clash harshly and cruelly with the bitter woe of the recent winter. But Mr. Graham grew impatient and importunate. My hesitation dilated his eyes with a strange distrust. Incapable of comprehending my grief, he listened to its voice with incredulity, which when I reflect upon it now, convinces me that he thought it simulated. Divining my feelings, and knowing that in my heart there was not a spark of real love for him, he believed my wish to defer the marriage to be an excuse to give

me time ultimately to break off the engagement. Not that he cared whether I loved him or not; his passion was to possess me; his fierce animal love reckoned that my sentiments could neither promote nor weaken its gratification.

Cursed as I was with a sad weakness of character, I was incapable of long withstanding his importunities. For some time I steadfastly held my ground, and then I surrendered. It was not only his entreaties, his expostulations, that had effected the capitulation. He had armed himself with another weapon—fear. He had made me afraid of him. I cannot pretend to say how this had been brought about; he had fascinated me, I know not by what magical process; and whilst I liked, I even dreaded his society. He did not command, he did not storm, he did not threaten. His politeness was singularly well sustained; I fancied I could discern the depth of his tenderness by its impassioned betrayal; he made me feel that he loved me, after his fashion of loving; and yet there have been times when I have reflected

with alarm on his politeness—when his love has filled me with misgiving, his tenderness with dismay. Mentally I was greatly his inferior; he had a wondrous quickness of apprehension; and with an eye as inscrutable as the night, he seemed to possess the power of exploring my heart to its innermost cell. My imagination undoubtedly gifted him with the qualities by which I felt myself mastered; but though I should have deprived him of all the power with which my fancy dowered him, much would have remained to have held me in constant fear.

Do not believe, however, that I could think then as I am thinking now. My mind was incapable of penetrating to causes. I took life as I found it, without inquiry and with little real concern. My inexperienced brain held me passive; I knew that I was subjected to him, but I did not think to examine the causes that achieved his mastery. There was something of indolence, too, in my character. I was content to play any painless part that might be allotted

to me, without bothering myself with the notion that I ought to be doing something better.

Are there not many like what I was? I have seen women leaning on the arms of husbands whom they did not love when they married, whom they have never learnt to love since. Yet there were no temptations to marriage held out to these women: no titles, no wealth, no promise of a generous and glowing future were offered them. They did not marry for liberty; nor were they forced into marriage by the necessities of their families, for many brought liberal dowries with them. They were not vain women, urged by frivolous impulses into a step which they have had to expiate with the loss of that romance which kept their hearts green and dewy, and gilded the world with all the gracious lights and tints which it has ever worn. I have acted as these women have acted, and can understand if I cannot explain the cause.

As an unmoored boat, without rudder or oar, will be carried to and fro with the stream

as it ebbs and flows, making, of itself, no passage, but owing its motion to the strong embraces of the tide ; so there are natures without judgment to steer or energy to propel, whose movements, we know, are not their own, but contrived by an influence which they might easily resist, but to which they lazily and listlessly yield themselves. These are the characters who will marry where they do not love ; who, were a cap and bells placed upon their heads, would jingle their harlequin tunes without capacity to sound the depths of their folly.

Mr. Graham was without kith or kin ; his parents had died when he was young, and an uncle had taken charge of him. He had been to sea a year, but hating the life had been allowed to relinquish it. He was then placed in a banking house in London ; whence, through the influence of his uncle, who was on terms of intimacy with one of the partners, he was drafted to a better post and a larger salary at Lichendale, where he had ever since remained.

Shortly after his arrival at Lichendale, his uncle had died, leaving the greater bulk of his fortune to three infirmaries, and the remainder to an old servant. With this uncle went Mr. Graham's last relative and only friend.

You may believe, under these circumstances, that our wedding was a very simple ceremony. I remember well the walk across the moors. It was a clear, crisp, sparkling morning; the snow lay in wreaths about the hills, and in the hollows like lakes of frozen foam. Harriet accompanied us. The heather was elastic to our tread; the lark shrilled its piercing notes from the serene blue-white height; the moor sheep baa'd from the hill-sides; but these were the only notes that broke the calm. John Graham held me tightly by the hand; we spoke little; but the subtle perfume of that breezy morning had filled me with a sort of tempered cheerfulness. I answered his questions. I responded to his occasional remarks with becoming demureness of speech and shyness of glance; but I could not always repress a thoughtless laugh,

and my eyes sparkled with a light borrowed more from the sunshine than my heart.

I remember the little church at Lichendale, with its low square tower thickened with ivy, with its old stained clock, its healthy, lusty peal of bells, its narrow windows crumbling at the lintels. We passed through its graveyard, ridged on one side with the mounds of paupers, showing brown and bare through the growth of wet nettles and lichens; on the other paved and bristling with tombstones. The sunlight poured upon the graves, and gave calm and beauty to the slip of soil imprisoning the bones of many generations of villagers. My father was not buried here; there was a church at Hunton that he loved sometimes to attend; and among his papers had been found a request that he should be laid in its burial-ground. Yet in the presence of the memorials through which we slowly passed I speedily grew sad; grimly they typified my loss; obtrusively they recalled that noble heart whose blessing would have made me glad on this bright spring morning.

The clergyman awaited us. Near the altar stood the clerk who was to give me away ; old Harriet gurgled occasionally in the rear. These were the only spectators. The old organ was mute ; the rows of benches pimped along the margin with Hymn-books and Prayer-books and Bibles—from the folio printed in type almost as large as the gilt characters of the Commandments over the communion-table, to the tiny clasped volume—gave a drear emptiness to the scene. But the sunlight streamed its blessing upon me in gorgeous tints through the stained windows, and I found comfort in my loneliness in the sense of the spirit of Jesus brooding over the spot on which I knelt.

The simple service was concluded, and the ring encircled my finger with a tightness which ought to have symbolised the inviolability of the compact into which I had entered. I had traced my name in trembling characters beneath the firm signature of my husband ; I had murmured my thanks to the clergyman for his courteous congratulations ; I had received

Harriet's damp kiss upon my forehead, and kissed her in return for her rudely-accentuated but warmly-meant prayer for my future happiness. Mr. Graham had ordered a fly to fetch us at the church ; we found it waiting, entered it, and were driven home.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE is many a bird that sings joyously when it is free, but which silences its note the moment it is caged. I had crossed the moors cheerily enough, with more buoyancy indeed than my heart would allow me a conscience for ; for the shadow of death still lay athwart my soul, and I felt I ought to have respected the sombre presence with more soberness of mind. But, strange to say, I recrossed them with a melancholy I could not exorcise. I witnessed, but with helpless annoyance, the consequence of my behaviour in the familiar gleam of distrust in Mr. Graham's eye ; in the brow that frowned rather with a shadow than by its corrugation.

Yet for the first few days after our marriage

we sailed along smoothly enough. There was nothing whatever of the lover about his conduct; but his manner was courteous, his conduct gentle. Yet even in this lay the cause that inspired the foreboding which later on provoked the 'scene' which I am to relate. It seemed to me that he was masking his true character. I would have had him less courteous and less gentle; for, however odd it may seem, his conduct suggested the behaviour of a jailer who, being new to his post, treats with consideration the prisoner consigned to his custody. When the novelty was gone I should meet with less tenderness. This frightened me. I saw plainly, with the keenness of a woman's vision, that I was not to expect anything like love—love in its pure, lofty sense—to plead in mitigation of whatever views he might hold concerning me. It was inevitable that he should notice the effect of my impressions on my behaviour before long.

'Kate,' he exclaimed to me one evening, 'what makes you so silent? you look miserable.

Don't you think my presence deserves a better compliment than averted eyes and trembling lips ?'

'I am not miserable, John,' I answered, a little pettishly.

'Then why don't you talk to me? I had a mind to question you last night, for I asked you several questions, but could tell by your vague way of answering them that you didn't hear what I said. You'll make me think that you don't love me, and that you regret your marriage. These are early times for the suggestion of such thoughts, and I want to think otherwise.'

He spoke with a tone of asperity. I raised my eyes, but they instantly fell before his penetrating gaze.

'If you will think such things, John,' said I, 'I can't help it. If I didn't love you, it was not very likely I should have married you.'

The answer was evasive and weak. I felt it so. By the pause that followed, however, I hoped that it had satisfied him. I little knew the nature that I had to deal with.

‘Kate, we cannot understand each other too soon,’ he began. ‘I think I understand you, and I want you to understand me. Your character is naturally weak and vacillating; you have accepted me and are married to me without knowing whether you love me or not. The doubt in your heart is certainty in mine. I know you do not love me; a mere caprice, a weariness of your stagnant life, any feeling besides love, dictated your acceptance of my hand. Now you are too young to know the extent of the wrong you are doing me; and my love for you is something you are never likely to understand, and therefore will never be able to render the full due it claims. But we are man and wife now; you are mine; and I am privileged to explain to you the conditions on which, in my own mind at all events, I have married you.

‘I cannot exact love from you; and if I have failed, as I know I have, to inspire it, I am not such an ass as to hope that the time will come when you will have learned

to love me. I am not disappointed ; clearly understand. I have watched you closely, and knew that I had no love to expect from you. (You will appreciate these stabs I am inflicting on my *amour propre*, and applaud the motive that induces me to deal them.) What I have to advise you now is, to be cautious in your dealings with my character. I repeat I do not expect love from you ; but I expect friendship ; and tenderness I must have, though it be counterfeit. Be cautious, I say ; my love makes my mind generous now ; it is without crudity, without taint or flavour of sourness in it ; it turns to you now with a fullness of warmth, with a light that seeks to circle and illumine you. Be wary lest you transform that warmth into ice—that light into darkness.’

Thus John Graham. I sat in mute amazement, watching him. My eyes were opened to their fullest extent ; my cheeks were colourless ; my bosom violently heaved. He had spoken with a voice of authority that he had

never before assumed. He had eyed me with a regard so sinister that I shrank from it as from something malevolent and baleful. His words re-echoed in my memory, and stunned me with their clamorous reiteration. I was too frightened to cry ; but my heart grew sick to its core.

‘John,’ I commenced falteringly, after a long silence, ‘this—this is a bad commencement. You have promised to treat me kindly. You made that promise to papa ; and what other promises of affection have you not made me besides?’

‘I am prepared to abide by my promises,’ he answered. ‘So long as you suffer me to treat you with kindness, I will treat you with something more than kindness. But I must not be repelled. Whatever your real feelings may be, do not let me know they are lukewarm.’

‘Why are you so distrustful? Why are you so suspicious?’ I exclaimed, with a sickly effort to smile. ‘Wait a little before you decide ;

examine a little more closely before you judge.'

'It would have been as easy for me to wait as it has been easy for me to speak,' he returned. 'But in married life, as in every other form of life, there are two paths—the one leading the right way, and the other the wrong way. We have now set out on our journey; therefore it was right that I should tell you at once the road I meant to travel by, that you might accompany me if you chose. However, we'll say no more about it now. The subject is not a lively one, although it is very instructive. My principle in life is to look the truth straight in the eyes. I have made you look at it so too, and rest assured you will be none the worse for the knowledge you have gained.'

As he said this he rose from his seat and sauntered from the room. I watched him enter the garden; then, mounting the stairs, entered my bedroom, and throwing myself on the floor burst into a passion of tears.

What was this life that had suddenly come

upon me; and where were my dreams, not of *him*, but of my future? Where was that dainty aërial fabric I had reared—that fabric radiant with pearl and gold, crowned with a triumphant banner, shone upon by a glory that had no similitude on earth? I had pored upon my future like the necromancer pores upon his book of hieroglyphs. Noble prospects had burst upon my eyes, soft melodies had fallen on my ears; in those dreams of my girlhood, dreams dearly cherished, all vague and undeterminable as they were, I had lived and moved and had my being. Where had they flown? What funereal pall was this that now shrouded them? The world was steeped in darkness; the light had vanished from the sky; my loneliness was enhanced by the sense of the inexorable presence which I had madly invoked, and which I felt was now to haunt me to my grave!

CHAPTER VII.

WE had no honeymoon. Mr. Graham had a fortnight's holiday allowed him by the bank, and he spent the greater part of it on the moors with his gun. He gave me as little as he possibly could of his society, and ominous were the inferences I drew from his behaviour. Not that I wanted his company; I was happier alone, for then I could think, and cry too if I chose. But I could see he was acting on what he was wont to call *principle*, and I dreaded the result that might follow his steady adherence to his half-insane theories.

I sometimes look back upon this portion of my life with a laugh, which the shudder that accompanies it makes half hysterical. My husband was, unhappily for me, of that order of men who

call themselves consistent. Having generated an opinion which, in one or two particulars, might have been corroborated by accident, nothing in the world would force him to relinquish it. He was not a blockhead, like most of your consistent men are; had he made up his mind to believe that the moon was inhabited he would admit his error in the face of scientific facts proving that the moon's atmosphere could not be drawn by any manner of known lungs. But his theories of human nature were not to be actually disproved. Having accredited a man with a vicious heart, his belief was not to be reasoned away by the most indisputable testimonies as to the man's virtues.

He had made up his mind to believe that I did not love him, and that I never could love him. I must admit his theory was correct. This belief was, he made me know, the principle that regulated his behaviour; and no bigoted Turk ever remained more faithful to the legend of the moon passing through Mahomet's sleeve than John Graham remained

faithful to his 'principle.' When in my society he was quiet enough ; but the urbanity of his manner was displaced by a certain despotism of language and conduct that, from being at first inexpressibly galling, ended at last in subduing and even cowing me. My health gave way beneath this nameless tyranny ; my eyes grew languid with the tears I was for ever secretly weeping ; had I feared him less I should have shunned him more ; but I dreaded his loud summons, I quailed before his keen questioning made bitter and stinging by his suppressed irritation.

As I got to know him better I made some discoveries. He was mean, constantly reproaching me for extravagance, of which I was guiltless ; perpetually bullying Harriet, the most saving of servants, for waste. He had, indeed, the excuse of a narrow income, and I had brought him nothing except the house he lived in ; but he was mean in minute details ; mean in a hundred pettinesses which not even want itself could have excused. Wretched

were the fires we now kept up ; wretched the fare with which we were forced to regale ourselves. I am fully convinced now that the forty-five pounds which he lent to my father he regarded as merely my purchase-money. The loan had emanated from no friendship, but was merely a scheme to confirm my father's liking for him by gratitude—of which he was keen enough an observer to know that the old seaman had an abundance—and whilst he foresaw that he would receive the whole of the money back, he would also be aware that the interest for the money he might have demanded—that interest being myself—he would at once have procured from my father.

Mean as he was, one extravagance he permitted himself ; a fault which promised, when occasion should suggest, to become a vice ; he drank. When, from some unexplained reasons, he would become moody, he swallowed enough brandy and water to tumble another man off his chair. But his libations produced

little effect on him. An increased radiance of eye, a certain abruptness of speech, an increased intensity of stare, marked the discernible symptoms. These would be followed by a strange dejection, with which, however, I could see he combated, either by taking a book or roaming about the house.

I remember one afternoon Harriet had been to tell me that she wished to leave. She informed me she could no longer stand Mr. Graham's bullying. He was always finding fault, she said; and so needlessly that she often felt tempted to throw a dish at his head. She averred that it was only her affection for me that had caused her to remain so long as she had. Many a time had she been on the point of coming to me to say that she must leave, her life being a positive burden to her under such a master, but had been restrained by the feeling that I should be friendless were she to go. She was no stranger to my misery. Though her deafness prevented me from complaining to her as I should like to

have done, I had yet communicated enough to make her understand that the life I was leading was slowly breaking my heart. She hardly required to be told this; she could read my story in my face, note it in my thin hands, my white cheeks, my dim eyes. But her endurance had at length been stretched to the cracking point.

‘I’m an ole lone ’ooman, Mees Kate,’ she always continued to call me thus; ‘an’ I can stan’ tis brow-batin’ no longer. I mun be gawin’ noo; I mun ha’ done wi’ ’t. I didna loike ’im from t’ beginning, and now I hates ’um. He cooms into t’ kitchen tis moornin’, afore steppin’ t’ Lichendale, and sez he, “I sees soom drippin’,” sez he, “in a whoite bowl—what’s t’ maning of it? Yer doant sells ma drippin’, I hope?” Sez I, dignified and flurried, “Tat drippin’,” sez I, “belongs to t’ mutton ye ate t’ oder Soonday; an’ I’m kapin’ of it for t’ next roost ye has.” “Doant you never sell ma drip-pin’, mistress,” sez he, “or any o’ ma bottles, or ma candle ends. For I doant allows of that in

my house." *My* house ! I could ha' told him it warnt his, but t' ould Capt'n's that lies sleep-in' awa' fra' here, who'd have his skin was he t' knaw o' his conduct.'

'But you are not going, Harriet?' I cried.

She nodded her head violently, shaking the tears out of her old eyes by the vehemence of the gesture.

I threw my arms about her neck, and implored her to remain. I conjured her by the affection she bore my father, and by the fidelity with which she had served him, not to abandon me at the moment when I was most in want of a friend. I told her, what was really my firm belief, that her presence held John Graham in some degree of restraint, by recalling recollections of my father; and I explained to her my sincere dread of being left alone with my husband, who would replace her by some one that, by espousing his side, and abetting his meanesses, would add to my misery. My passionate entreaties so far prevailed that she said she would go and think it over. She left the room,

Even so feeble a character as mine will sometimes turn when the iron heel upon its neck has been pressed too cruelly. As I sat pondering over what Harriet had told me, I found myself becoming angry. My cheeks grew hot, I bit my lip, and clenched my hands.

‘I will defy him!’ I exclaimed. ‘It is because he has found me a slave that he has shown himself a tyrant. It is because I have sat cowed, instead of haughtily confronting him, that he has wronged poor Harriet and ill-treated me. If he finds me unwilling any longer to bend, he will perhaps forbear attempting to break me down. Am I a coward, a baby, that I remain inert and trembling before him? Have I no rights to claim, and no spirit to assert them? One effort, and I may perhaps free myself. As to love, I have no fear of extinguishing that. For *my* part I fear him and detest him. And *he*, the one object of his marriage being achieved, regards me as an enemy over whom he has triumphed, and whom

all his efforts must constantly be directed more and more to crush.'

It was about the time that he usually returned from Lichendale. I sat at the window awaiting him, drumming the floor angrily with my feet, and fanning the flame of my indignation by recalling all the taunts, the slights, the ill-treatment I had received from him. The evening was at hand, falling moist and calm upon the broad moors. The sun, making gigantic shadows of the hills, was sinking into a crimson curtain of cloud, and upon the serene depths of the eastern sky beamed one splendid star, the forerunner of the hosts who were lighting their torches ready to rush upon the night.

I saw him turn the corner of the hill before long, and march with his determined tread to the house. Should I speak at once? No; he would be tired after his walk; it would be time enough to tell him what I had on my mind after tea. He entered noisily, slamming the door after him, and, whilst he divested him-

self of his light overcoat, called to Harriet to get the tea ready, and to cook him an egg. He came into the parlour, taking no notice of me, and threw himself heavily into an arm-chair. It had been my usual custom to greet him with some common-place remark—some reference to his walk, to the weather, to his day's employment. This evening I was silent. I had glanced at him as I entered, then resolutely turned my eyes windowwards, seeing but not remarking the ruby splendour of rays which the hidden sun was projecting like a glory about the summit of the hill, behind which it had disappeared.

I turned presently, and found him regarding me. There was a chilling satiric smile upon his lips, which might have taken warmth and passion from his eyes.

‘Good evening, Mrs. Graham,’ he said. ‘Are you well?’

‘Quite well,’ I answered doggedly.

‘I hope you have been playing with no edged tools?’

Imagining his question had a double meaning, I returned no answer.

‘Have you?’ he cried, in a tone like a bark.

‘No,’ I said.

‘I thought it probable. I had fancied you had cut your thumb, for you seemed to be suffering from lock-jaw.’

‘It is not my fault that I am quiet. Were you to lead my life you would be quiet, too.’

‘What life do you lead? You are perpetually complaining. Are you not leading the life you led before we met?’

‘The same life, with a difference.’

He might have noticed something defiant in my manner. I caught him peering at me beneath his arched eye-brows. The smile had vanished; his mouth was now tight and hard.

‘Hurry your old crone with the tea. I am hungry and thirsty. I doubt if the deaf dolt heard my order.’

I did not want to begin the discussion just then. My courage, instead of paling before him as I had feared, found stimulus in his offensive

manner. I reflected that the longer I waited the fitter I should be for the encounter. As I was rising to obey his behest, Harriet entered with the tea-tray. He rose to light the lamp as I made the tea, moving with an energy suggesting that every action of his limbs was the direct result of a strong galvanic shock. The meal passed in silence; he sat cracking his eggs and swallowing his tea with sullen taciturnity; preoccupied with my own thoughts, I studied the mother-of-pearl doves and wreathed convulvi in the tea-tray, not once regarding him. When tea was over he took his pipe and commenced to smoke. He would not allow a fire to be lighted in the little back room where papa was wont to sit, nor would he condescend to use the kitchen; so he blew his strong fumes in the parlour. I submitted without protest; I had submitted to much worse without protest.

With slippered feet upon a stool, he lay comfortably back in his deep-seated arm-chair, clouding his head and dimming the little room

with smoke. I took some embroidery and pretended to sew.

‘What have you got for supper?’ he asked,

‘The remains of some hashed rabbit,’ said I.

‘What are you working at now?’

I held it up to him that he might see.

‘You are always at that useless filagree work. Are we so rich that you can afford to potter over rubbish of that kind? I should have thought you would have learnt to make shirts, dresses, bonnets; ay, and even coats. If you were to busy yourself over occupations of that sort, depend upon it I should hear less complaints of your dullness.’

‘You never do hear complaints of my dullness,’ I exclaimed. ‘When have you ever heard me complain?’

‘Do you think there is no other language than the language of the tongue? I say that your whole life is a complaint. You complain by your moping; you complain by your red eyes; you complain by your silence. You try to make me believe that you are miserable, and

you are succeeding in your efforts. I really begin to think you are miserable.'

'Think it; it is the truth; I am miserable—wretchedly miserable.'

He filled up a short pause by lighting another pipe. This done, he remarked that if I was miserable I had no one to thank but myself.

'I understand you,' I exclaimed; 'I ought never to have married you.'

'I did not mean that,' he cried angrily. 'You might have been happy with me had you chosen. But I saw what your game was on the very day we were married. Do you remember that drive from the church? I do, if you don't. I can recollect your sulkiness, your obvious regret at our marriage, your positive distaste of my company—that is, of *me*—your husband of a few minutes old. I suppose you give me credit for some degree of sensibility! Did you think I could continue playing the lover to a woman who disliked me? Not I. I could see pretty plainly that there was no hope of anything

like affection ever springing up between us, for my character, as you ought to know by this time, is a character of extremes ; my passions do not cool, but they become transformed ; they do not soberly soften and take gentler names, but leap to opposites ; but as we had to live together I resolved (selfishly if you like) that you should minister to me at the sacrifice of your happiness. That is why I have obliged you to tread the path it suits me you should pursue. You are docile, quiet, obedient. I am contented. Had I suffered you to play your own part, your flippancy would have maddened me, your sauciness would have kept my blood in a perpetual state of ferment.'

' And what of those pretty love passages you used when you asked me to marry you ? Did you not tell me enough to make me believe not only that you would love me, but that you would be gentle and kind to me ? What must you have said to papa to inspire him with the high opinion that he had of you ? You played your part admirably ; but I wonder, with your

love of principle, that you could stoop to act in so low a character as that of a hypocrite! You might have guessed that when your acting was most excellent it was most likely to be hissed.'

This last sentence was not quite *à propos*; but I was too excited to care much for relevancy. He showed his teeth as he exclaimed, in a low but harsh voice,

'I beg that you won't talk like that.'

'I will, though!' I exclaimed, bursting out. 'Though you should kill me, I'll speak the truth. Your conduct is barbarous and inhuman. You commenced your cruel behaviour on the very day of our marriage, and have continued it ever since. Why didn't you let me see more of your character before you married me? You were soft and loving enough until you gained your end, though even when you were most soft and loving, I tell you that I distrusted you. What made you want to marry me, I should like to know, if you knew I didn't love you? You couldn't make any-

thing by me; I brought you no money, of which you are so fond; I couldn't improve your position, indeed I could only be a burden to you. Are you a coward, that having discovered that I never cared two straws about you, you resolved to marry me that you might avenge yourself upon—upon'—(I was going to say 'my contempt') 'my indifference? I can tell you this much, that I mean to put up with your behaviour no longer. You may triumph in the knowledge of my friendlessness, and consequently my helplessness; but whilst my heart beats and my brain plans you will find me capable of something more than quietude, docility, and obedience,' laying as sarcastic an emphasis as I could command on the words.

I paused with crimson cheeks and swelling bosom. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, regarding me disdainfully. There was a malevolent gleam in his eye, however, which told me that some of my arrows had pierced.

'You found me,' I went on, 'an innocent romping girl, with a heart from which a noble

father's love had averted every shadow. You might have moulded me to what shape you wished. Though you knew that I had no love for you, you might at all events have made me respect you. Your friendship would have been followed by affection, and your devotion by love. It was probable; you may not believe me, but I know the truth. Now see what you have done! Your conduct has added ten years to my age; you have stamped out every joyous feeling that ever sprang in my heart; you have transformed one who might have made an affectionate wife into an outraged reckless woman. Yes, you have! and more than all, you have made me hate you! Hate you!' I repeated, as I sprang to my feet in the violence of my passion, and commenced pacing the room.

'You hate me, do you?' he said.

'Yes; and curse the hour that saw me married to you!'

'You are growing too melodramatic,' he remarked coldly. 'I should recommend you to moderate your language. You will not be less

eloquent by being less violent. And now, sit down. That pacing to and fro annoys me.'

Disregarding his order, I persisted in my march. He rose, and took me by the arm ; I was whirled through the air, and deposited in my seat.

'Sit there !' he exclaimed, 'and whistle back your senses, which have gone a-straying. Not that I dislike you in this passion. I prefer it to your tears, and whining, and moping. It shows, at all events, that you are not quite the somewhat sour milky compound I have thought you.'

If it be possible for the blue eye of a woman, white-lidded, deeply-fringed, to look savage, mine must have looked so as I sat violently rocking in my chair, straining my hands to my breast to restrain its pantings. Yet violent as was my passion, there was nothing hysterical about it. I was quite tearless. You have met with a clear gale sweeping through a cloudless sky? Just so was my passion.

‘Are you mad,’ I presently panted out, ‘that you treat me in this fashion? What can be your object? what end do you hope to gain by your tyranny?’

‘I wish you would be more discriminating in your language,’ he answered, heavily sinking into his seat; ‘you apply words whose significance wholly confounds your meaning. First, as to being mad, I am not clever enough to be mad. I am not a genius; if I were mad I should not be a banker’s clerk; more probably I should be a poet or a reformer. Next, as to my tyranny; I deny that I am a tyrant. Prove against me a single act of tyranny.’

‘Your life is a prolonged act of tyranny!’ I burst out.

‘Not so much violence, if you please. Name me a single act of tyranny of which I have been guilty.’

He paused for an answer. It came, after a moment’s reflection.

‘The whole of your conduct is tyrannous. Your manner towards me is a sort of weight

upon my life, breaking it down, and crushing it to the ground.'

'What manner? Give me a single illustration of your meaning.'

'I cannot. You are too clever to give me an opportunity of charging you with a direct proof of the wrong you are doing me. My life is like a nightmare. I am sensible of a black stubborn weight upon my heart, bringing terror and hopelessness.'

He took me up sharply.

'How dare you charge me with tyranny, when you can prove no tyranny against me? You hate me—that's the truth; you bitterly repent your marriage; it is over this marriage, and the babyish caprice that led you into it, that your face grows pale, your eyes red, your hands thin; and you would meanly try to excuse this show of grief by charging me with the crime of occasioning it. I know you! Do not anger me. By G— you will, if you tell such lies.'

Was it possible that this man was really igno-

rant of the inhumanity of his conduct? I asked him—

‘Do you mean to tell me you don’t know how cruel you are to me?’

‘You are more imbecile than a baby,’ was the polite answer. ‘If you picked a flower, and a thorn were to enter your finger, you would lament a whole week over the injury.’

‘Answer me, I say; do you pretend to be ignorant of your cruelty?’

‘I’ll tell you what it is,’ he exclaimed, sitting erect; ‘I’m not going to be baited with what and why in this manner. You have made use of some remarks this evening which I’ll take care not to forget. Leave me alone; you have said enough. You have given me the contents of your mind, for which I am grateful. I know you are as bleared as an owl; therefore I have taken the trouble since we have been married to make you see certain truths, which it suits me you should understand. But there are other truths which I do not mean to take the trouble to let you see. If you want to know

them find them out for yourself. I do not carry my heart on my sleeve for such as you to peck at. There is much written there which you may read, if you can. It is immaterial to me whether you interpret it or not.'

I was not to be pushed from my point.

'You refuse to answer my question!' I cried.

'Oh, you are an admirable humbug!'

'Silence!' he exclaimed, menacingly.

'An admirable humbug!' I tauntingly repeated. 'You put your foot upon me as though I were some lower animal, and whilst you press pretend not to know that I am under you! I can tell you one truth; there is another person besides myself in this house who hates and despises you, and who would have left you long and long enough ago but for the affection she bears *me*!'

I saw his black eyes glittering. He sprang to his feet so menacingly that I shrunk in my chair. With an angry stride he approached the door, and flung it open.

'Harriet!' he roared.

Deaf as Harriet was, she must have heard the summons half a mile off. She entered the parlour. Mr. Graham returned to the fireplace and stood erect before it.

‘Mrs. Harriet,’ he shouted, ‘you will have the goodness to leave this house to-morrow morning. You will prepare my breakfast as usual; after my breakfast I shall enter the kitchen, and expect to find what boxes you may possess standing corded, ready to be taken away by you. If on my return at a quarter to five I find you still in my house, I will fasten you in a room until I can procure a constable, and then have you locked up as a vagrant. Now leave this room.’

Poor Harriet! She was an old woman; I should think over sixty years of age. She had a face like a cobweb of wrinkles, in which her mouth resembled a rent, her nose an invasion from behind. As Graham ceased, there came over this honest mask such a spasm of wrath as made me fear or hope that she was about to rush on him with her nails. She did

not speak, however ; with a quick glance at me, she left the room.

‘ Now,’ said Graham, turning to me, ‘ I have to beg that you will not open your lips again to me this night. I caution you to be on your guard. If a single syllable escapes you, I’ll not answer for the consequence.’

He spoke in a tone of genuine savageness. My passion had in some measure subsided ; my old terror of him was rapidly regaining the ground it had lost. I turned to my work, he took a book, and the evening passed in dead silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRIET was replaced by a little red-haired girl, with a nose like an accent, and arms like carrots, who, if I remember rightly, received something less than a quarter of the wages we used to pay our old servant. To me, however, it was of little moment what servant we had. I had no longer any authority in the house. Mr. Graham took the place that was properly mine; kept the accounts, ordered the dinner, and—yes, I must confess it—counted the washing!

Is there such a thing as pure tragedy in life? I doubt it. In my experience I have ever found the dismal occasion streaked thickly with the ludicrous. Humour certainly shoots best on the trunk of tragedy.

Are you looking for any verisimilitude in the character of John Graham? I have no doubt you are. I should not be surprised were you to find none. If his character, drawn by Nature, seemed to me a huge improbability, I cannot wonder if its improbability should be heightened by the crude portrayal I am attempting. I have been told that when a man narrowly escapes death, the occurrence seems to him nothing more than a distempered dream. When matters get to their worst they make their identification with fact very difficult. There were times when I could not realise the life I was leading. It seemed impossible that it could have an existence ; it seemed impossible that it could last.

‘This is a nightmare,’ I would reflect. ‘I will awaken from it presently. I am dreaming that papa is dead, and that I am married to John Graham. Those vague suspicions inspired by his eye are, in this dream, leaping in vital embodiment. The spirit, unobstructed in its operations by the grosser faculties, is achieving the high perfection of thought which is unat-

tainable in one's waking moods. It has anticipated the future ; it has fleshed the gaunt thoughts which have stirred lazily in my heart, and is making me see them as they will be. I will accept the caution ; when I awake from this clinging dream I will shun John Graham.'

Well, recurring to it now, I may really call it a dream. The dull terror has passed ; I am composed, serene, happy ; I have broken through the night into a morning crisp, radiant, aromatic ; that cottage, made horrible by its associations with its swarthy tyrant ; the billowy moors ; the hateful presence of the man I had called husband ; have melted into thin air. There is an auroral light upon my heart and in my eyes ; I shudder, indeed, to look back upon the darkness ; but the gloom is worth a glance, for it teaches me to comprehend the gladness of the light I am now bathed in.

One day, about three weeks after Harriet had left us, I was sitting in my bedroom sunk deep in a reverie. The thoughts I pondered were not unfamiliar. They had kept me awake

night after night. They had held me in a trance throughout the days. It had entered my head to run away from home. Faint-heartedly had I received the first suggestion : but I had grown more courageous as I had continued thinking over it. Hope, long buried in the sombre canopy of those days, began to shoot quivering uncertain gleams through the murky curtain. And yet most uninviting was the prospect it dimly illumined. I was wholly friendless ; I gazed upon the great world towering above me, and found it menacing and repellant. How could I, a weak, inexperienced girl of nineteen, scale those heights which I knew I must attain before I could draw the breath of life ? Should I leave this house in which at least I found shelter and food, though the shelter was as inhospitable as a jail, and the food acrid and unnourishing as the prisoner's sour fare, I must seek a living ; and what could I seek ? for what occupation was I fit ? Judgment thought to come to the rescue :

‘Do not reflect,’ it spoke, ‘or you will be lost. Determine quickly; act resolutely. Do not pause to consider future ills; the worst that can happen will be endurable compared to your present sufferings.’ But Timidity stepped in. ‘If you leave, whither will you go? Can you become a servant? Look at those hands; they are white, thin, sinewless. With them you cannot scour floors, blacklead grates, sweep staircases; and if you do not become a servant, what else can you become?’ ‘Resign yourself to chance,’ urged Judgment. ‘And die of starvation,’ sneered Timidity. Thus I was impelled, thus opposed. The violence of the conflict set me pacing the room.

It was Saturday; Mr. Graham would be returning early. I tried to banish my thoughts for the present that I might compose my face. I dreaded his penetrating eye; I feared his sagacious suspicion. I had little doubt, were he to suspect my half-shaped resolution, he would lock me up in a room during his absence, or set some one to watch me.

I turned my gaze to the window. How beautiful was this afternoon!—that sky tinted with the calm pure radiance which shines from the eyes of spring as she melts upon the bosom of her sister summer; those moors soberly clad in the vari-coloured garment of heath; those ridged hills, speckled with browsing sheep, marking their shapely outlines against the shadowless air; that range of blue mountains, with summits whitened by the splendour of sunlight, fainting on the opal sky. Many an afternoon as balmy, as dewy as this had shone upon me, and found me happy; now it looked upon the most miserable wretch within the circle of those mountains.

Composing my features before the glass, and settling my hair to improve the character of my forced serenity, I descended the stairs and entered the parlour. To my great surprise I found Mr. Graham standing at the window.

‘I did not hear you come in,’ I exclaimed.

He turned a face unusually harsh and dark upon me, as he answered, ‘I have been in twenty minutes.’

I had seen him in so many moods, marking the line of descent in the bad passions, that this particular moroseness of his now gave me no unusual concern. He was perhaps irritated, I thought, by my not having come down to greet him ; for in proportion as we grew estranged from one another did he exact civility from me.

‘ If I had known you were in, I should have been to see you before,’ said I, as conciliatingly as I could.

‘ No doubt,’ he answered, I know not whether sneeringly or absently, steadily gazing out of the window.

I didn’t much care to be with him, as you may believe. His surly manners told me that I was not likely to get fair speech in reply to any interrogations or civil sentences I might put to him. So I was about leaving him to return to my bedroom ; where, at all events, I could think without having my reverie perplexed by his sinister presence, when he suddenly cried out : ‘ Where are you going ?’

‘ Upstairs.’

‘Stay here, can’t you? I have something to say to you. You are always for running away when I am near.’

I seated myself, folded my hands on my lap, and waited for him to speak. He stood drumming the window-panes with heavy fingers in a long pause, which was premeditated, I presume, to show his utter indifference to my presence. As I watched him I cannot describe the feeling of detestation that entered my heart. It was well he didn’t turn just then; it would have driven him wild to see the hate in my eyes. Heavily drummed the fingers, the strong foot tapping a sinewy accompaniment. Presently he confronted me with a rapid movement.

‘I hate to tell you bad news,’ he said; ‘my ill-luck would be sweet to you as revenge.’

‘Don’t judge me by yourself,’ I answered. ‘Besides, you contradict yourself. The other day you told me I had no cause of complaint because I could prove none. If that is true, what revenge can I want?’

‘You are growing very sharp and shrewd. I

am making you keen, am I?' No answer.

'What do you mean by your infernal sauciness? I said I had bad news to tell you. Couldn't you hear it without being impertinent?'

'What is your bad news?' I asked.

'Jamieson's bank suspends payment on Monday. The doors will be closed—the shutters barred. The printed *affiche* is ready—the scoundrels! The second partner has absconded with fifty thousand pounds in gold and notes.'

This was bad news for Jamieson's bank and Jamieson's customers; but I was incapable at the moment of seeing how it could affect him. I told him so. He was very angry at what he considered my stupidity, and applied to me names which would have earned him a hearty kicking had a stranger been present.

'Nothing penetrates your thick dull mind,' he continued, after the flourish aforesaid. 'Can't you understand that my services are dispensed with? I have lost my place and salary, and God knows where I am to seek for another.'

This was a blow which ought to have affected me; but it didn't. I was not glad, as he thought I should be, at his loss; but I sympathised so little with him, that I was not in the least degree sorry.'

'They are the foulest pack of villains under heaven!' he burst out excitedly, clenching both hands and striding passionately to and fro the room. 'They owe me a quarter's salary—that might pass. But I had a hundred pounds on deposit with them; and though I've served them faithfully and honestly for over twelve years, the scoundrels never told me that the bank would suspend payment until the shutters were up and I was in the street. One hundred and forty-five pounds—that's what I've lost.'

'But is it too late to recover the hundred pounds?' I asked. 'Wouldn't Mr. Jamieson give it to you were you to call upon him and ask him for it?'

'Too late?' he cried, stamping his foot. 'Ay, forty-eight hours too late. Jamieson is in

Scotland—left for Glasgow on Thursday; his nephew has bolted; depend upon it the uncle is in the secret, and will be heard of no more; Cox, the old woman, is aghast and pale, crying “Oh, my gracious!” and vowing he is ruined. “Curse you!” I swore to him when he told me the news on leaving the bank together; “why didn’t you hint this to me before? I could have repaid myself from the till; there’s over a hundred pounds in it.” The old villain began to shed tears. “Give me the keys!” I roared, “I’ll have my money!” At this he took to his heels—I followed. Sixty as he is, he ran like a hare: flew, dodged, vanished. I missed him in the market-place. By this time he has emptied the till and is on his way to the devil!’

He ceased, eyeing me closely, breathing heavily. I tried to look sorry; and probably succeeded, for he seemed satisfied.

‘Perhaps you’ll tell me what I’m to do?’ he presently broke out. ‘I have twenty pounds in the world. When that goes—what then?’

‘Is there nothing you can do?’ I asked.


‘Is there nothing *you* can do?’ he retorted.

‘Nothing,’ I answered simply.

‘You’ll have to get rid of the girl and do her work. You’ll have to clean and cook; we must dine off potatoes and breakfast on dry bread. That’s what *you’ll* have to do. My twenty pounds may carry me far enough to find work; but what employment,’ striking his hands together, ‘am I likely to get that will produce me the income I have been receiving? Do you know that this country is overrun with needy wretches who would cut each other’s throats for a crust of bread; who choke up every petty avenue; who, to gain a salary that would not keep a pig in acorns, will elbow, crush, trample on each other like people trying to get out of a theatre on fire?’

‘It is hard to get on nowadays,’ said I, mechanically.

‘There you sit, paltering your commonplaces, “It’s hard to get on nowadays,”’ mimicking me (he had never been so undignified as this in his worst moods). ‘*You’ll* find it is hard.



When I begin life in earnest you'll have to begin it too, I can tell you. By Heaven! rough, coarse, hungry work is the medicine you want to purge your mind of its intolerable weaknesses, to bring colour to your cheeks, and—if you must cry—to give you something to cry about. I'll go to Australia. I'll go to America. I'll be a backwoodsman, and make you help me to fell trees, to build huts, and plough the soil. That's what I'll do.'

I listened quite composedly to him. The last ten minutes had wondrously hardened my resolution to leave him. I doubt if the menace of murder would have more violently stimulated my energies than this threat of emigration. Imagine me in the backwoods of America with John Graham!

Having thus expressed his various resolves, he sank into a sullen silence. Before long he went to the cupboard, poured himself out a glass of brandy, which he swallowed, fell back into an arm-chair, and seemed to surrender himself to deep thought.

CHAPTER IX.

RESOLUTIONS often resemble eggs which hatch dead chicks. Mine did. As regularly as I resolved to run away from John Graham, so regularly did my wavering mind suggest a further delay. The truth is, I had no conception how I should act, and what I should do, when I *had* run away from him. That an hour would come which should witness my flight I well knew, but meanwhile I was as dilatory as a hawk, who sails round and round the object it means presently to strike, before it swoops; or a lapdog that performs several tours before it finally adjusts its form in comfort on the hearthrug.

Had there been a human soul in this wide world to whom I could have appealed, I would

have been long enough ago a good many miles away from the moors. There was indeed a tradition that had come to me in my childhood of a sister of my mother's having emigrated to Australia. But thinking of Australia is like thinking of posterity. At the distance of so many thousand miles I could never have given that phantasmal aunt the personality I should have required before seeking her.

At home the stagnant pool of life began to grow weedy. Mr. Graham would have dismissed the little servant as he had threatened, had she not volunteered to remain without wages. This, of course, saved me from a fate I had sincerely dreaded ; that, I mean, of having to do the servant's work myself. As to our living, what he had promised came to pass ; we fared rather more poorly than an ejected Irish family. Sometimes, indeed, he would take his gun and return with a bunch of birds, which served to season our potatoes ; but we grew ignorant of meat, of butter, of sugar ; the trades-

people grew weary of inquiring why we had left them ; and life passed over our heads much as it passed over the head of Robinson Crusoe, who, with his parrot and his goats, was decidedly less companionless than I.

I do not know whether Mr. Graham made many efforts to procure occupation. He had talked energetically enough of emigration at the commencement of his troubles, and had returned to it often enough in his sour, savage moods ; but in a manner that plainly intimated he had no more intention of going to America than he had of going to the moon. Now that he had no employment he was a good deal at home ; but sometimes he sallied forth after breakfast and did not return till late in the evening. He would come in worn-out, dreadfully bad-tempered, and using language sharp and chilling as a madman's. At such times I hardly knew what to do ; for if I ventured to accost him, he would snap at me in a fashion that put me in dread of my life ; whilst if I did not address him he would turn

upon me and bully me for my indifference to our position.

‘Why do I not leave him?’ I would angrily inquire of myself. ‘Why should I allow my stubborn timidity to keep me ironed to this dungeon of a home, sentinelled by the inhumanest of jailers? By a mere effort of my will I might in a few days place as many leagues between me and him as I chose to walk or ride.’

. It was easy enough, however, to ask why; but I could give no response. I was influenced I suppose by the philosophy of the axiom that affirms it better

To bear the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.

So I let the time slip by, vowing one moment, recanting the next. I even went so far one day, when I had heard him say he should be absent until night, as to resolve to leave him then and there, to walk to Hunton, whence I could push on to any large town I might hear of; so I mounted the stairs, and had even gone

to the length of collecting a few things to make into a parcel, when my old irresolution seized me. I ceased my work, began to ponder the step, and, of course, abandoned it.

About three weeks had elapsed since the closing of Jamieson's bank. For the last two or three days I had noticed that a change had come over John Graham's manner, which I could in no way account for. His moroseness had not abandoned him; he was still bad-tempered, and whilst his fits of passion were not only more savage, they were more frequent. But underlying all this exhibition of the man's bad nature was a sort of nervousness, a sort of fidgetiness which, knowing his character pretty well, set me wondering.

He had been out all day on the moors shooting, and was lying back, obviously wearied with his day's tramping, when I first took notice of this change. Raising my eyes I met his fixed on me with a gaze keen, passionate, but strangely troubled. Drink was beginning to tell upon the lustre of his black orbs, staining

them with crimson webs, and dimming the fire of the irids. Yet they were still good shining mirrors of his soul, and in that stare which he fixed upon me I took note of an expression of angry dismay and fierce inquietude which was not to be discerned there before. His subsequent manner and language confirmed my suspicion; he was assuredly not quite the same John Graham I had known him. All that was bad in him found the same sharp expression; but in this expression a new element was discernible—something obvious as the sinister gleam in his eye; something sombre as the swarthy corrugation of his brow.

This discovery shaped itself into a presentiment. It made me restless; agitated me with vague, undeterminable terrors. For a long time the dark doubt of his sanity had been familiar to me; I had endeavoured to solve the tragic conundrum of his nature by the test of madness, and fancied that I had found the key. Those sudden bursts of passion, I would argue, that savage moodiness, those eyes charged

with ominous light, these surely must be indications of madness. Would any man in his senses have acted towards me as he had done after his violent professions of love? And was it not with something of a madman's cunning that he contrived to inspire poor papa with that high belief in his goodness and the manliness of his character which I had so often heard him praise?

The alteration I had noticed in him convinced me that the madness with which I accredited him was assuming a new phase. It might be the prelude to some terrible outburst; me it particularly menaced; and as I pondered I grew more despairing and more agitated.

For three days I watched him narrowly. Fear possessed my eyes with an expression of keen scrutiny. He became sensible of my furtive but eager gaze, and once burst upon me thus: 'Do you think me a wild beast that you sit watching me like that? Heaven confound your inquisitiveness! What do you mean by this prying?'

‘I did not know that I was prying.’

‘You know it now, then. If you want to *make* me a wild beast, you will *think* me a wild beast. If you want a face to watch, stare at yourself in the glass. Don’t be eyeing me like that; I’ll not have it.’

After this I became more cautious how I looked at him.

Quite certain that his brain was becoming crazed—crazed through disappointment, crazed through drink, crazed through the impulses of his baleful passions—I seriously, sternly at last, made up my mind to leave him. This time, whilst eagerly questioning myself as to what was to be done after I was clear of the moors, I met with a response. Thus spoke a voice:—

‘You are sufficiently accomplished to become a governess. Governesses must be in request. Buy the “Lichendale Advertiser;” narrowly search its pages; it [may happen that you will light upon something you want. It may offer a situation far enough away from the moors, that will suit you. If there be

nothing in the first copy you buy, do not despond, but purchase a second, a third, a fourth number, until you meet with what you seek.'

It was mid-day: a fine, sunlighted, breezy hour. I took my hat, threw a shawl over my shoulders, and neither knowing nor caring whether Mr. Graham was in or out, sped across the moors towards Lichendale. At the pace I walked it did not take me long to traverse the two miles; and in three quarters of an hour I had reached Lichendale, had purchased a copy of the paper, and had started on my return home.

I kept the paper in my pocket, intending to examine it in my bedroom. I was not sure but that I might meet Mr. Graham; he would examine me upon my absence, and I had no wish to excite his suspicions by giving him the faintest idea of the purport of my journey. I walked hastily on, tremulously eager to reach home, that I might search the paper; and anxious, too, that my husband should not

remark my long absence. When I turned the hill, however, I saw him walking to and fro in the garden ; he let me approach him close before he accosted me.

‘Where have you been?’ he asked, removing his pipe from his mouth, and searchingly regarding me under the shadow of his hat.

‘For a walk,’ I answered.

‘You have been a long time gone—over two hours.’

He had seen me leave, then ! What a mercy he had not followed me ! I must tell a falsehood ; there was no help for it.

‘I have been roaming about the moors. The day was so fine that I remained out as long as I could. My watch has stopped ; had I known the hour I should have returned before.’

My foolish anxiety to explain made him more suspicious. He eyed me as a sentry in the time of war eyes a stranger. I passed on, eager to get away, lest my undisciplined nerves

or face should betray me. He suffered me to go without further words ; but I could easily picture the angry suspicious gaze he followed me with.

Arrived at the cottage, I mounted at once to my room. I would not pause to remove my hat and shawl, but, seating myself on the edge of the bed, drew the newspaper from my pocket and eagerly scanned it. There was one broad sheet of advertisements. Detachments of servants advertised for mistresses, and mistresses for servants ; farmers spoke of forthcoming sales of cows and sheep ; local brewers advertised their beer ; dressmakers their newest fashions ; a superlative quack absorbed half a column in enumerating the diseases which he guaranteed his pill to cure ; linendrapers screamed in notes of admiration ; the page looked like a mob of tradesmen bawling their wares. Like the faces in Hogarth's ' Laughing Audience,' each column seemed to echo with a separate roar of its own. Vainly I sought what I wanted ; amidst the ruled concert of appeals and wants, invitation:

and cautions, the name of governess was not to be found. I turned the paper inside out, hoping that the governesses might have a separate space allotted them ; here there were no advertisements at all, but a collection of local news, which quickly interested me. One column was taken up with 'Further Information' respecting the stoppage of Jamieson's bank ; and by its side two columns were filled with letters signed in corpulent initials from clients who had lost money by the stoppage aforesaid.

To judge from its 'Advertiser,' the quiet town of Lichendale—to use the language of journalism—must have been in a state of very great excitement ; for, as if the failure of Jamieson's bank were not enough to stimulate what emotions the townfolk possessed, a murder had been recently committed on the high road between Lichendale and Gainston, the distance between which places was about as far as our cottage was from Lichendale. The report of the coroner's inquest held on the body of the

murdered youth occupied a large portion of the paper. It was headed, 'The Late Shocking Murder.' Glad of a chance to chase away the feeling of disappointment that had followed my ineffectual search, I began to read.

What I read was to this effect. On the afternoon of the preceding Tuesday the body of a clerk belonging to a joint-stock banking company established within the last twelve months at Lichendale had been found concealed in a hedge on the road to Gainston. His brow was swollen and livid, obviously from a blow struck by a ponderous fist ; so decided the coroner. The murder was accompanied by a great robbery. The clerk had been sent to a branch of the bank to which he belonged, established at Gainston, for a supply of notes and gold to the amount of two thousand pounds. The whole of this money had been taken from him. Three men were already in arrest on suspicion of being implicated in the affair, and the police were actively engaged in pursuing certain tramps who had been seen

loitering in the neighbourhood. The coroner announced that bills were being distributed throughout the country advertising a reward of one hundred pounds by the magistrates and two hundred pounds by the bank to anyone who should lay such information, &c.

This information the 'Advertiser' had given by way of prefacing the report of the examinations. Now they commenced. The first called was the manager of the branch bank. He deposed that on Tuesday morning, according to the custom of most banks when an unexpected run has drained their exchequers, or when heavy calls were anticipated (and Wednesday was market-day at Lichendale), he had instructed James Martin Wilson, the deceased, to present a draft at their branch office at Gainston for two thousand pounds, for which he was to receive five hundred pounds in gold, and one thousand five hundred pounds in thirty bank notes of fifty pounds each. Wilson had been eighteen months in the bank, and was always considered ,

A noise at the door disturbed me. Raising my eyes, I perceived John Graham standing on the threshold. Either I must have been very deeply interested in what I was reading, or he had mounted the stairs very softly; for I had not heard him until he was in the room. My first movement was to conceal the paper. The action struck him at once.

‘What have you there?’ he asked.

I held out the paper that he might see. His swarthy cheeks grew a little pale, it struck me, as he read the name.

‘What were you doing with this paper?’

I was reading it.’

Where did you get it?’

The plight I was in left me no alternative but to be audacious.

‘I bought it at Lichendale,’ I answered.

‘At Lichendale!’ he exclaimed, dilating his black eyes. ‘When were you there?’

‘I was there to-day,’ I answered coolly; for an excuse had suggested itself to me, and I believed it would suffice.

‘What! you have been there to-day?’

I answered ‘Yes.’

‘Then you have told me a lie. You just now assured me that you had been loitering on the moors.’ Knitting his brows, he approached me by a stride. ‘What is the meaning of this?’ he asked, angrily. ‘You are concealing something from me; you have a secret: what is it?’

‘Well, I have a secret,’ I replied, with as light an air as I could assume, and forcing a smile, which I am afraid must have very closely resembled a grimace of pain. ‘I was determined to keep it to myself as long as I could, although I guessed that it would not be very long my own. You have eyes to see through a wall.’

How suspiciously he watched me! What a world of dislike, distrust, passion, flamed in his searching gaze!

‘Why do you pause? Can’t you go on?’ he asked.

‘I’ll be as plain and brief as I can,’ I said.
‘You asked me the other day, in reply to my

question whether there was nothing you could do to get a living, whether there was nothing *I* could do? I thought over your reply; and it occurred to me there was something I *could* do. I could teach; I could become a day governess. Not knowing how to set about to procure pupils, I thought I might meet with some suggestion in the "Lichendale Advertiser." The idea only presented itself this morning, and, as I was eager to put it into practice at once, I resolved to walk over to Lichendale. There, you have my secret.'

The essential gift of blue eyes is their power to look innocent and injured, plaintive and truthful. In my serene orbs he probably witnessed as fair and full a corroboration of my words as he could hope to find. Saying no more, he began to scan the advertisements. I saw his quick eye rising and falling to the columns. He said,

'There are no advertisements for governesses here.'

'No,' I answered, 'but there will be, perhaps, in the next number. I see it is published

three times a week, so I sha'n't have long to wait.'

My success had strengthened my confidence; I could watch him fearlessly. Presently he opened the paper; his eye lighted on the report of the bank stoppage; he began to read, swaying his tall form with regular gesture like a man sustaining his equilibrium on a rolling vessel. My eye was on his face. I was wondering whether he was really reading, or meditating the doubts which my actions had excited. Suddenly an extraordinary spasm contracted his features; his cheeks and forehead grew livid; he dashed his hand violently upon the paper, and approached me by another step.

'Swear, by the living God, that what you have told me is the truth,' he exclaimed, in a low tone that vibrated with the excess of his emotion.

I trembled: I was terrified; what I had told him was not the truth, and, not to save myself from instant death, could I have violated the sacredness of that awful Name to apply it to a falsehood,

‘Swear it!’ he cried furiously, seeing me pause.

‘I will not swear,’ I answered. ‘You may believe or disbelieve, as you will; but I will not swear.’

‘You have told me a lie!’ he shouted. ‘You know—you know; my God! *what* do you know? tell me—speak it out—do not fear me! See here, I am calm; look! my face is composed—my voice low. Tell me now.’

With the paper crushed in his extended hand, he stood before me, rigid, expectant, still. I tried to speak, but my voice, choked by fear, died inaudibly in my throat. I burst into tears, sobbing with a violence that convulsed me. Waiting until the paroxysm should have passed, he tore the paper to pieces, flung open the window, and watched the fragments scattering in the air.

What change had come over him? What mighty effort had he exerted to quell his mutinous glance, to sober his offending sneer, to brighten his gloomy brow? With an air of

humility, he turned to me ; his voice trembled, a strange expression of agony and contrition wrought upon his face. He addressed me like a suppliant.

‘ Kate,’ he began, ‘ I conjure you—not by your love, for you have never loved me—but by the affection felt for me by your father, to tell me the truth. *It was not to carry out a project of becoming governess that you walked to-day to Lichendale.*’ (This with deep-toned emphasis). ‘ You did not buy the “ Advertiser ” from *that* motive. Tell me the truth, Kate ; if you have a doubt, speak it ; hide nothing. If there has been dislike, hate between us, your confession will transform it into love, on my side. I will know how to appreciate your candour ; your sincerity will make me very fond of you.’

He might conceal his passions by his mien, but not for long could he keep his eyes veiled ; even as he spoke, they scintillated : a tigerish gleam glowed. He was crouching only to spring ; he could not make me believe that this

crouching was fawning, identical as they seemed. Thoughts swept rapidly through my brain. Did he really suspect that I meant to leave him? Was he coaxing me now that he might learn the truth? Was he kissing me, so to speak, only that he might suck my secret through my lips? I could not tell. He had asked me a question which I could answer.

‘I have told you that I have had thoughts of becoming a governess. I repeat, that my walk to Lichendale was purely and simply to purchase a paper, that I might attain my end.’

‘Will you swear this?’

‘I will swear it.’

‘By the living God?’

‘Yes.’ This was the truth; I could affirm it now by the oath he demanded.

‘Repeat it in full.’ He dictated a formula, adding, ‘Do you know what this oath means? You are conscious of the magnitude of the sin you will commit if you perjure yourself under an oath so tremendous?’

‘I am conscious,’ I replied, ‘of the signifi-

cance of the oath you have prescribed. I could wish to avoid the mention of the Almighty's name under such conditions ; but, since you impose the oath, I will take it.'

I then repeated his formula.

His lineaments cleared ; a hard smile came and went, a fitful wintry ray upon his tempestuous face writhed his mouth. He retreated from me. With the lifting of his fear went his fawning air. He resumed his old tone.

'You could have saved all this trouble by swearing at the commencement,' he said.

'The occasion did not warrant it,' I replied.

My answer seemed to please him.

'Perhaps it didn't,' he said. 'But you told me a lie in the garden, which made your actions mysterious, and I was resolved to know the truth.'

He left the room, hissing a tune through his teeth.

CHAPTER X.

I HAD feared, when Mr. Graham had thought over my scheme of teaching, that he would take it into his head to help me. Knowing pretty intimately the direction taken by his strongest sympathies, I had never doubted that could I have earned money in the most menial drudgery, that drudgery he would have bullied me into adopting. You may believe I did not want to be helped by him, for I judged that his interference would seriously mar my plans by delaying my opportunity of escape. To my great delight, however, he did not again recur to the subject, from which I inferred that he felt no interest in it.

Extraordinarily gloomy he had now become. There had been times when certain dull rays—

faint indications shall I call them, of a better nature taking advantage of a sober mood to assert itself?—had pierced his sombre character, and softened his presence with something almost endurable. But now it seemed as if a thicker darkness had settled upon his spirit. Sullen and silent he wandered about the house and the garden; at times lost in so deep abstraction as to cause my remarks, infrequent indeed and commonplace enough, to fall unheeded. His eyes no longer met mine with the straight, daring, searching outlook, which had lent them all their strong character; they wandered restlessly over me, never indeed quitting me, but never steady.

Though I was not conscious of his having made any efforts to secure employment, I did not doubt that he had often tried to do so. Those long excursions which he had repeatedly made without his gun convinced me that his tours, wherever they might have led him, were not on pleasure. His search for work was fruitless; he had grown despondent and hopeless. To his

disappointment, then, I largely attributed the deepening gloom that clouded him.

We continued leading the same hum-drum, half-starved life, which he had imposed upon us after the loss of his situation. At the same time it was beginning to occur to me that he was making the small sum, which he had assured me was all he possessed, carry us further than twenty pounds will usually carry a family of three. 'What can his intentions be?' I would sometimes muse. 'If he has only twenty pounds in the world, by this time that money must be nearly exhausted. What does he propose to do when it is gone? Half of that sum, if not more, must surely have been consumed in brandy alone; and yet he remains nactive, forming no resolutions, proposing no chemes.'

The truth, I supposed, was, that he had deceived me as to the amount of money he had in hand at the time of the stoppage of the bank; and instead of twenty pounds, it might have been fifty or even a hundred. More

than this, however, I did not believe it could be.

I was particularly interested in wishing to know what money he really had, for the moment of my flight was at hand; and it was necessary that I should start equipped with a sum sufficient not only to land me at a safe distance from him, but to support me until I could support myself. I had become weary of looking over the 'Lichendale Advertiser;' it was plain that nobody in this neighbourhood, or in the wide district in which the 'Advertiser' was supposed to circulate, was in want of a governess. Nothing remained for me, then, but to hunt from town to town until I had found what I sought. Remain longer with my husband I could not. My mind was made up; my resolution formed. I had determined to leave him on the Tuesday in the following week; it was then Thursday.

It was summer-time now. The lush month of June had come, rolling over us an array of days calm as heaven, warm as the aromatic

breezes of Spain. The stunted trees that had sentinelled the moors through the bleak bare winter, were now heavy with foliage; the glad lark quivered from the heather, and soared in its melodious flight; the hills were clad in green; the distant becks tumbled in musical splashes; it was a time for which I had waited. It seemed to me that I could venture much, soothed by the sleepy splendour of the sunshine, watched over at night by the glittering skies, and the crisp clear moon which was now broadening to its meridian light.

Though his eye was dulled, though his suspicions lay dormant, though he seemed now so habitually preoccupied as to appear wholly unobservant of what was passing around him, John Graham's character I knew must remain radically unchanged. The lightest spark would set that dry decayed spirit of his in a blaze; the most trivial hint would excite a train of speculations which would inevitably prove fatal to my hope. Unusually circumspect was I, therefore, in his presence; dismissing for the

time being, with stern energy from my mind, its near conception, that I might more easily play the part which was familiar in his eyes.

I had discovered by an accident where he kept his money. Of that money I had determined to take a portion. Judge me as you please. I am not the apologist, but the narrator of my life.

I had seen him leave the house one day, pass through the garden, and walk on to the moors. I seized the opportunity to mount to my room and look over my jewellery, that I might see how far my own resources would leave me independent of the resources I meant to appropriate from my husband's purse, presuming him to have one. He was so much at home that I could find little leisure for the work I now meditated. I could not forget, too, the slyness with which he had climbed the stairs and entered my room on the day when I was reading the 'Lichendale Advertiser.' There had been something cat-like in the stealth of that act. It had

occurred once, and it might occur again ; and my hopes were too eager to run the risk of such vigilant surveillance as he was obviously capable of exercising when his suspicions were aroused.

The bedroom window was open ; a balmy air, scented with heather, and busy with the hum of flies, and the metallic notes of distant sheep, breathed upon me. I began my task.

There were a good many odds and ends of jewellery to be collected, some trifling, some more valuable, before I could form any opinion upon the value of my treasures. I could boast no jewel-case, and the trinkets lay dispersed throughout the shelves of my wardrobe, hidden under dresses, or scattered among the linen in the drawers. Most of what I possessed had belonged to my mother ; many little nick-nacks had been given me by my father. A few days after we had been married my husband had presented me with a locket in dead gold, containing his hair, and bearing on an inner lid the inscription : ‘ To my wife Kate Graham from her husband John.’ This was the only present

he had ever made me. I remember opening it and reading its inscription with a dreary sadness. I would not part with it; it was the symbol of the terrible ordeal through which I had passed; it was sacred in my eyes as a type of my despair. Moreover it bore my name, and I felt reluctant to let it pass into strange hands. So I slipped it into my watch-pocket beneath my waistband. It would serve to identify me, at all events, should I die in some strange place.

My little stock of jewellery lay heaped upon the bed. There was my watch; that, I reflected, would surely be worth five pounds; there were a pair of Indian bracelets, which had been given to my mother by her brother, an officer in the Indian army; an old-fashioned silver card-case, a pair of earrings set with opals, a gold eyeglass, an amethyst brooch, and a great gold brooch shaped in an anchor. Here was an ivory fan; and in that box were some gold rings, including my mother's wedding-ring, a pale worn hoop (which with my own I slipped by the side of the

locket), some sparkling with gems of a value I could not guess ; and there were more plain earrings, and a thin chain which I used to wear when a child as a necklace ; a little cross which had been given by my mother to papa, and papa's solid old watch-chain, with its old-fashioned bunch of seals. These, with a few more trifles, comparatively valueless, formed my jewellery. I collected them carefully, and rolled them up into a parcel. As I hid it in my wardrobe I observed that the paper was damp with my tears.

Like the old beloved associations that had awakened, my tears had flowed softly and tenderly. They left my eyelids stainless. Not knowing whether John Graham might have returned, I smoothed my hair and went lightly downstairs. The study door was open ; I heard the clink of money. Looking, I perceived him standing before a tall thin chest of drawers, a sort of cabinet, indeed, which my father had used for his papers. The top drawer was open. As I slipped into the parlour

I heard him push the drawer to, lock it, and heard the jingle of keys.

So, then, I had at last found out where he kept his money. But for the fact that I was in want of money to help my design, I should have paid no heed to the discovery. It would have been nothing to me whether he concealed his gold in the hollow of a tree or in a hole in the ground. Had I reflected, I might indeed have suspected, that had he any money at all, he would naturally put it somewhere under lock and key. But that somewhere—where was I to seek it? The house was full of drawers and cupboards; he had his portmanteau, too, which he always kept locked; and without definite knowledge to guide me, any search for his deposit would have probably been as hopeless as the search after the philosopher's stone.

He had lighted his pipe, and as he passed out to the garden—for he was in and out now twenty times a day—he just looked in on me. He might not have expected to see me; his

countenance, however, expressed no interest in the discovery. He marched out, trailing a thin wreath of smoke upon the still air, and striking energetically with a thick short stick at the long grass or the occasional leaf.

What was working on his mind to give his face that altered look? A haggard expression had overcrept it; beneath his eyes a deep livid hue had gathered; his lips had paled and tightened yet more; the flesh had fallen in on his cheeks; and an habitual scowl knitted his eyebrows into one long line across his brow. Some physical agency must have wrought this change. This could be the consequence of no such mental sorrow as disappointment, but the effect of something active in its ravages upon the body, as pain, disease, intemperance. It was probably the latter. 'He must be drinking more than I am conscious of,' I thought. 'If he persists in this excess he will frenzy his brain, will quicken the madness in his blood.'

I had planned Tuesday for my departure. There was to be a meeting of the creditors of

Jamieson's bank on that day at Lichendale, and I judged that the business would detain him until a late hour. Monday came. It made a day in the calendar of my life against which I could score a great red cross. It was well for me that John seemed preoccupied with thoughts of his own, or he must infallibly have remarked my restlessness. Remain seated for any length of time I could not. The fruition of my dream, long perplexed but for ever maturing, was at hand, but not yet arrived. Wild alarms seized me; agitated impulses set me wandering about like one in a dream. I found that I had lost all power of self-restraint. Nothing therefore remained but to keep as much to myself as I could. This, however, was not permitted. I was lingering during the afternoon in the parlour, turning mechanically the leaves of a book which I had taken as an excuse for my abstraction should John break in on me, when I heard him calling my name from the garden. I went out. He was pacing a narrow walk conducting up

the side of the house. When he saw me, he exclaimed :

‘Here ; I want to have a talk with you.’

What tincture of red my face might have held died out at this, and left my features pale as an evening cloud. I went to his side, however, without hesitation, keeping my face as much averted as I well could, until I should become composed enough to meet his gaze.

‘To-morrow,’ he began, ‘there’s to be a meeting of the creditors of Jamieson’s bank. The assets of the firm are likely to be stated, and I shall hear what dividend we are to get. Twelve and threepence in the pound, they say. Do you hear?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why do you hang your head when I speak? If this don’t interest you, what will? I don’t know how it is, but I can’t speak three words to you without finding myself irritated by something offensive in your manner.’

‘I am very sorry for it. I have no wish to

irritate you. Pray go on.' I raised my head and gave him a bold stare.

'When the dividend is declared it will, I suppose, be soon payable. When I know the amount I am likely to receive I mean to sell off here and go to London.'

If he expected an ejaculation of surprise or any other emotion, he was disappointed. What was it to me what he meant to do?

'In London,' he continued, 'there will be some chance of getting a living. The few pounds I shall hope to scrape out of my loss will enable me to open a shop. I mean to turn shopkeeper. Do you object?'

He eyed me with a sort of malicious triumph. He thought the suggestion would offend me, and he exulted in the sense of humiliation the avowal would inspire.

'I do not object,' I said.

'I should hope not. I doubt if it would profit you much if you did. There are opportunities for making money in London which never occur in such despicable holes as this place—holes

just fit to rear bull-dogs in and ploughboys. I've been thinking the subject over, and find I can put you to some use. None of your minnikin governess-schemes for me ; but something that will feed us, if it makes us common. *You* of course would like to stick to the fine lady ; starve in the genteel capacity of a governess rather than dine well in the vulgar capacity of a cook. Oh, I'll uproot those gaudy weeds from your mind ! I'll make you a woman fit to be admired.'

'What is your proposal ?'

'To turn your good looks into service. You have the very figure for a counter—the very face to attract the scented snobs of London into indiscriminate purchases. You'd sell gloves and Eau de Cologne well—but there ! I haven't decided yet on the business I'll take. My project is a good one. Why don't you commend it ?'

It was, perhaps, my policy to oppose him ; a tame, prompt acquiescence might look suspicious:

'I can't commend it. I object to it. Have

you so little pride left as to wish to see your wife humbled to such an occupation as you propose.'

'Pride? I don't understand the word. No man ever did who knows what hunger is. If you think I'm going to starve to pamper your conceit you must have studied my character to very little purpose.' He spoke fiercely.

'Well,' I exclaimed, 'I don't wish to argue with you. I have at all events studied your character enough to know that if you have made up your mind to do a thing you will do it. I must follow, I suppose, and make the best of it.'

'You are coming right,' he said, eyeing me, I thought, with unnecessary closeness. 'What you have said is the real philosophy of *your* life. Come! since I find that you know the theory, I may expect the practice.'

He uttered a sharp raking laugh as he knocked the ashes from his pipe against the palm of his hand. I had no wish to prolong this agreeable chat, so I turned away and walked towards the house.

‘That’s right,’ he cried after me, ‘avoid me as usual as though I were carrion.’

‘I’ll come back if you like,’ I said, suddenly halting.

‘No. Leave me; we shall have enough of each other’s society in London.’

‘Will we though!’ I muttered through my teeth, retreating to the house. So his intention was to make a shop girl of me, to set me up as a decoy to entice men to enter and make purchases!

Away in the south I had heard my father tell there was a church lavishly effigied with the memorials of our race: marble shapes perpetuating the aspect, inscriptions signalling the valour, of the long line of heroic sailors who had fought and bled for their country; fought against the fleets of Europe through reigns dating earlier than the days when the Duke of York beat the Dutch off the Nore, and burned their vessels with their own fire-ships. The sole representative of this old and honourable race, I was to be made a shop girl; to be set

up in silk, painted red on the cheeks and black on the eyelashes, powdered, and padded, and bedizened to please a tribe of gaudy-shirted men, whose coarse hands needed the concealment of gloves, whose languid pulse demanded the stimulus of Eau de Cologne. Was it not time, think you, that the bond was severed that linked me to this nightmare?

Slowly passed the hours. The sun sank; the stars came out; the moon, delicate and dim as a cloud, but rapidly focussing its light that it might by and by flood the earth with silver, soared above the distant hills. The last night that I was ever to spend in Heath Cottage, hateful now in my eyes as a charnel-house, for in it lay strown the skeletons of my cherished hopes, my fondest dreams, fell upon me like a benediction. But it found no still heart to bless. There was something to be done that night, of which the very thought kept me in a fever of excitement. An undertaking lay before me of a character so perilous, of a consequence so doubtful, that at times, in pon-

dering it, my soul sank within me, the pulsation in my breast grew faint, a cold dew chilled my brow. I felt almost unequal to it; and yet, in spite of all the warnings of my physical incapacity, my resolution to attempt and achieve it remained steadfast and daring.

My usual time of retiring was about half-past ten; John chose a later hour. I have told you before that he drank; but I had never seen him intoxicated, never even stupid or unsteady. Quicker gestures, a fiercer eye, a sharper brutality of language, an admixture of insane oaths and aimless apostrophes—these were the characteristics of his inebriety. His deepest and most potent draughts were taken at night; I could guess the consumption by the way he came to bed. Do you think I judged him by his noisy manner, by his disturbing step, by certain clamorous soliloquies? By no means. What would be true of many would be seldom true of John Graham. I judged him by his silence, by the stealthiness of his tread, his cautious glances, his rapid move-

ments, a certain weird implication of cunning and crime in his mien. There was one effect, however, which drink produced on him in common with the rest of men—it sent him to sleep. Upon this effect I now reckoned.

I left him at the usual time, and went to my room. I stood a long time at the window, looking out before I commenced to undress. I did not like this serene night. There reigned within and without a stillness which the very beating of my heart disturbed. Strange noises at long intervals broke from the moors, looking sombre and ghastly in the pale envelopment of moonshine; the croak of a bull-frog in the marsh; the faint shrilling of a night-bird; the distant bark of dogs. I could have wished that resplendent orb, whose rays made a dim daylight in the air, was veiled; that those mellow stars were shrouded; that a high wind howled and filled the darkness with complaints and groans. This would have dulled the faculties of eye and ear: now, sharpened.

and chastened by the serenity, they were exquisitely refined.

I extinguished the light and went to bed. The moon fronted the window, and spite of the green striped blind, filled the room with a silvery haze in which everything the eye rested upon took clear outlines. Prayers for my safety, prayers for the accomplishment of my purpose, broke from my lips. I strove hard with my cowardice ; I sought to subdue terror by apparitions conjured up from the life I was leading. I struggled to fortify resolution by shadowing in harsh embodiment the grim future which had been indicated to me that afternoon.

In deep thought the time passes quickly ; my breathing was suddenly suspended by hearing sounds that warned me of my husband's approach. He entered the room and struck a match : seeking and finding the candle, he ignited the wick. I was sensible of the light ; but I lay with closed eyes, my face buried in the pillow, simulating, but I fear poorly, the

regular respiration of a slumberer. His noiselessness was promising ; I dared not open my eyes, lest I should unexpectedly meet his gaze : but my hearing, quickened by my want of sight, could follow his movements as readily as though I watched him. I heard him wind up his watch ; I heard him blow out the candle ; then he came to bed.

I lay still as an image, with my faculties strained to pain, like one in a catalepsy, who remains sharply sensible, yet cannot move. He was soon asleep, breathing deeply, and remaining in the attitude in which he had first lain down. I suffered half an hour to glide by before I acted ; I judged that his first sleep would be the soundest, and that, should he awaken from it, the sleep that followed would be light enough to render his disturbance easy. Creeping out of bed, with suspended breath, I turned to the clothes which he had thrown in a heap on a chair, and extracted his keys from the trousers pocket : my shuddering hand caused the keys to jingle. I paused, as if suddenly frozen. The

deep respiration continued, breaking at intervals into a guttural snore, and the long form lay motionless. Not waiting to throw a dressing gown over my shoulders, but taking the candle, I moved to the door. My naked feet pressed the carpet soundlessly as the velvet feet of a kitten; I turned the handle, it grated: but still he slept.

Suddenly a terror seized me. Suppose he were lying with his eyes open! suppose that steady respiration were counterfeited! that stirless attitude simulated! I stole to the bed and gazed: his eyelids were tightly sealed. If ever sleep were sound, that man slumbered soundly then.

I crept from the room, and went downstairs. The hall struck chilly to my feet. I entered the kitchen; closing the door that the rasping of the match might be dulled, I lighted the candle and passed into the study. The door of that room I also closed, and then commenced to fit the keys to the drawer. The bunch was large, and for fear of making a noise, I had to handle them as

though they were red hot. I tried a number before I hit on the right one. Then the bolt flew, and the drawer came open.

I had not expected to find more than a few pounds, and of whatever I found, it was my intention to take half. I was prepared for the contingency of his discovering his loss in the morning. He would not know to whom to attribute the theft; he might even think that the house had been entered, or might charge the servant, who of course could not be convicted without evidence; and what evidence could be produced against her? He might hasten to Lichendale for a constable: there was much he might do to take him away from the house; and of course, during his absence, I should take my departure.

Expecting, as I have said, to find only a few pounds, I raised the candle, and peered into the drawer. I started: the candle waved in my hand. The drawer was full of sovereigns—of sovereigns piled in rows, yellowly shining in the flame.

What dismayed me? What sickened my heart, palsied my limbs, dilated my eyes? What had recalled all at once, like a lightning-beam scathing my soul, like a stiletto piercing my breast, the murder of the banker's clerk on the high-road to Gainston?

Unable to hold the candle, I placed it on the table, and pressing my hands over my heart, looked once again at the yellow rows staining the dark oak bottom of the drawer. Up in the corner I spied a roll of paper; I drew it out—it was a crisp packet tied in red tape, and formed a bundle of bank-notes. 'Thirty bank-notes of fifty pounds each!' That was the cry dinning my ears, echoing shrilly through my being. 'Count! there are thirty bank-notes of fifty pounds each!' I untied the string, and keeping the notes in their place with one hand, counted them with the other.

There were thirty, and each note was for fifty pounds.

I tied the bundle, and placed it as I had found it. I shut the drawer, which seemed to

me now heavy as with blood, and locked it. Then a new terror numbed me. Should my husband find me *now*—find me hanging over his desperate secret

I opened the door ; I darted noiselessly upstairs. Let him encounter me anywhere but in *that* room ! I extinguished the light and entered the bedroom. My first glance was at the bed ; he was there, breathing heavily, but he had shifted his position, had turned completely over, and now lay with his face half hid in the pillow, with his arm and clenched fist full length along the coverlid. Noiselessly I replaced the keys in his pocket ; then, with a loathing that curdled my blood, a horror that stiffened my veins, a sickness that damped my face, I lay me down by the man whom I had discovered to be a murderer.

CHAPTER XI.

THIS then was the secret that had crimsoned his eyes! this it was that had hollowed his cheeks! that had shrouded him in the gloom which I knew now to be of hell!


The day broke bright and beautiful. I had seen it pass through all its gradations from darkness to glory; seen the dim suffusion of the dawn, the chilling beauty of the sun's first rays, the genial splendour of the voluptuous June morning as it soared from its slumbers and robed itself in its festal magnificence. Sleep had not visited me that night. Through the long hours I had lain awake, my eyes fixed upon the darkness which stirred, quickened into shapes, writhed with shadowy laughter, and hissed out of the perfect stillness.

On this blackness, left by the waning moon, I saw a tragedy enacted ; the vague shapes died, the shadowy laughter ceased.

There stretched before me a landscape of moors, over which a high-road rose and fell. The sun was veiled : a gray pall obscured the sky, reaching to the hilly horizon. A wind, plaining like a tormented thing, swept through the groups of trees that shadowed at intervals the road. A sullen dismal day, falling damply on the heart and holding the brown birds in the hedges mute and still as russet leaves. A shape, that of a youth, moved along the road ; he strode cheerily forward ; to his side was strapped a bag, which he held with one hand. The bag seemed heavy ; the protective hand occasionally raised it to lighten the pressure of the strap upon the shoulder. Suddenly a tall form jumped over the hedge ; it approached the youth ; it raised its clenched fist and struck. The youth fell in a heap : smitten on the brow, which turned black. The tall form lifted the youth, jumped again over the

hedge, and stooping over the body, emptied the bag, crushing the crisp paper into his breast, and filling his pockets with gold. Then seizing the body, he thrust it savagely into the hedge and strode with long paces rapidly away.

That damnatory tragedy in 'Hamlet,' played before the royal murderer and his consort, never stood out more vividly before an audience in its terribly significant dumb-show, than this scene stood out upon the darkness of my chamber. when the moon had paled along the east and left the room in gloom. Again, and again, and again, it was enacted: I saw that arm raised; I saw that cruel quick blow dealt; I saw the white brow of the youth turn black. That form which did the murder was by my side; it slumbered deeply; it breathed regularly. Sleep had expunged from the tablet of the mind the bloody vision that I was now witnessing; but it recurred to him in the daytime: it blanched his cheek; it sunk him deep in the mental hell which crime



had lighted and which burned with inextinguishable flames.

The sunlight streamed at last ; he stirred, he awoke, and being awakened rose. I feigned sleep ; I guessed my haggard looks, my eyes into which all the horror of the discovery had entered, and wished to subdue them ere we met. He dressed rapidly and silently ; shaking me, he told me the hour, and left the room. I rose and examined my face : a most colourless presentment, pale-eyed, white-lipped, leprous-browed. When I died I would look so. I bathed my face in cold water and rubbed it hard to give it colour ; I tried to dress quickly ; but my limbs were weak, my breathing difficult, my hands damp, and cold and shuddering. Entering the parlour, I found him seated before the meagre breakfast of sugarless tea and dry toast. He did not raise his eyes, but merely marked his recognition of my presence by pushing the teapot in my direction. Presently he said, 'It's my intention to charge Jamieson and his crew in language that will cause a disturb-

ance. I mean to become a demagogue in this affair. I'll head the creditors—become spokesman. As an old servant of the bank I shall be respected ; as the possessor of an unpleasant secret or two I shall be feared. I shall make myself so offensive and dangerous that to silence me they shall buy me off.'

'That's a good idea,' I said with an effort to speak naturally.

'I shall also see Hancox about the furniture here,' gazing about him ; 'he is the only respectable auctioneer in the county I am told. If I could sell by private contract I should save the expenses of a sale. There are some good old pieces of furniture here ; they ought to fetch money.'

'Papa used to boast of his furniture ; our bedstead and the wardrobe, for instance.'

'There's not much to boast of,' he answered. 'But there ought to be a good two hundred pounds taking it as it stands. I'll put an advertisement in a London paper. I'll announce

the lease and furniture for sale, and write a flourish about its healthy situation and its excellence as a retreat for indigent people. I'll also start Hancox to work. There is a good deal for me to do to-day ; I sha'n't be home till late. See that you get me something eatable for supper. Cook that rabbit.'

'Very well,' I said.

He got up and went to the study. My heart stood still when I heard the jingle of the keys. Had I disturbed one of those many little piles of sovereigns? Had I placed the roll of bank-notes exactly where I had found it? I listened with suspended breath. He lingered a long time over the drawer, keeping me in an agony of apprehension. At last I heard him shut it : he went into the kitchen, lighted his pipe, and marched out of the house. I watched his retreating figure as he passed down the garden ; outside the gate he paused, turned ; he seemed to have forgotten something ; no, he flourished his stick, blew a white cloud upon the air, and

walked forward. In a few moments he had vanished round the hill.

I waited a little ; for the fit of indecision might yet be on him ; he might yet return. Nay, I would be sure. I entered the garden, opened the gate, walked until the bend of the hill no longer obstructed my view ; there he was, tramping along with his massive strides, a long way off already. Satisfied, I re-entered the house, mounted the stairs, and shut myself up in my bedroom.

In ready money I had two shillings ; my worn-out purse held no more. But I had my stock of jewellery, and I was resolved to change it into money on my arrival at Hunton. I thrust the packet of jewellery into my pocket ; I hastily collected a few necessary articles of dress, my brush, comb, &c., and rolled them in paper. I then tied on my bonnet, over which I threw a veil, drew on a warm cloth jacket, and with a farewell glance at the old familiar room stole downstairs. In the hall I paused ; the girl was scrubbing in the kitchen ; I must

risk her seeing me. I hid the parcel under my jacket, opened the front door and passed quickly out. Swiftly I glided down the garden, through the gate, on to the pathway leading to the Hunton road. The moors stretched before me; soon I had entered upon the narrow highway, deeply rutted at the margin; a curve took me round a hill, and the cottage was blotted for ever from my gaze.

The sun was high in the heavens; but the dew still lingered on the tangled heath, and the air in its tempered warmth breathed balmily, as it crept across the country. I pressed hastily forward, sometimes half running, and constantly gazing fearfully behind. I passed a small farmhouse, a white-washed, flag-roofed structure; a heavy fellow, leaning on his pitchfork, stood smoking his pipe at the barred gate; he eyed me with laborious curiosity.

‘How far is it to Hunton?’ I asked.

‘Ye’re there, walkin’ fastish, happen in twenta minutes!’ he answered.

I thanked him and pushed forward. The

road I traversed began to broaden. I overtook a man driving a flock of sheep ; I dare say he must have thought me mad, for I had no notion how rapidly I was walking, until, having passed him, I looked behind, and found him and his 'fleecy charge' grown small in the distance. Presently the road inclined ; I gained the summit, and looking down perceived that I was within a few hundred yards of Hunton.

The road led straight into the High Street, a street of gabled-end roofs, and white stony fronts, with windows lying flat thereto, many-paned and darkly-burnished. The sign of the 'Thistle and Grapes' tavern projected far over the street, giving prompt greeting and useful notice to the thirsty drovers and waggoners coming from Lichendale or beyond. An old town was this, made Hogarthian by the rude minuteness of details forcing themselves upon the eye. Ruddy children, bare-legged and bare-headed, crowded the doorways, screaming to identical groups opposite over the barricade of plank that obstructed their egress. Old women

—types of female antiquity to be met with only in such venerable places—sewing at the open windows, mouthed with toothless gums to each other across the street. I passed the church, a crumbling pile, with a tower pierced with loopholes like those in a fortress, and with a low oaken door thickly scored with dropsical initials carved by the wanton hand of many a rude forefather now sleeping near its shadow. The place was sacred ; I hurried by the long low wall with averted eyes, not daring to look towards the fresh white tombstone, railed in against the side of the church, under the green cloud of a weeping willow, lest the sight of my father's grave should unnerve me ; there was much to be done by my nerves before they could have rest.

I reached the market-place, a succession of old sheds, and looked around me. Opposite was the town-hall, distinguished by a huge bleared clock. A few shops extended beyond it : a butcher's, a greengrocer's, a shop with windows filled with every conceivable kind of article.

Near me stood a man tending his stall, on which lay a few plump fowls. I turned to him.

‘Can you tell me of a good jeweller in this town?’

‘Nay,’ he answered.

‘Is there no jeweller here at all?’

‘Ay,’ he said. ‘Happen there’s one, but ’taint a good ’un.’

‘Whereabouts is his shop?’

He pointed up the street. ‘’Taint but a few steps oop this soide,’ said he; ‘but I can’t recommend oon. Ye ma’ tell oon, if ye loike, that James Fairly says he can’t recommend oon. He knows me, and I knows oon.’

I did not enquire the cause of James Fairly’s prejudice, but directed my steps to the place he indicated. I soon came to the shop: a little place, with a little window made dwarfish by several very large silver watches suspended to a rod. I pushed open the low door, which rang a shrieking bell, and entered. A thin, old, hump-backed man, looking weird in a pair of huge pinchbeck spectacles, came out through a door

at the back. He took his place behind the counter with a bow, but he was so little that he had to get on a stool before he could see above the till.

I drew the packet of jewellery from my pocket and laid it on the counter. I had framed my story, and this is what I told him :—

‘I am a governess, and have been called away from Lichendale in a hurry. I have a long journey before me, and have not the requisite funds to carry me to the South. I have therefore resolved to part with my jewellery ; and hearing of you, I have called to know whether you will buy these things.’

He looked at me inquisitively through his absurd spectacles. ‘Are these them?’ he asked, pointing to the parcel. I replied that they were.

He opened the paper, and spread the contents. The nature of the articles made my story appear probable. He examined them carefully, and enquired what I wanted for the lot.

‘I have fixed no price,’ I answered ; ‘I have no conception of their value.’

He dismounted from his stool, re-entered the back room, and presently re-appeared with a pair of scales.

‘There’s none of these things worth much,’ said he. ‘Please take a chair ’m.’

I seated myself on a high stool and watched him. He was a long time achieving an estimate (*his* estimate, I should say) of their worth. First he produced a small bottle and a feather, and anointed them all around with a drop of the liquid, bringing his long lean nose close to the article he touched, to mark the result ; afterwards he weighed them, pondering over the scales with the intense gravity of an alchemist watching the effect of an experiment he had been twenty years maturing ; then he raised a magnifying glass to his eye, and scrutinised the stones, leaving his stool in order to approach the light. The town-hall clock brayed a quarter to eleven ; he had been forty minutes at this work and had not yet concluded. I

made a movement of impatience. All at once he exclaimed with amazing abruptness,

‘I’ll give you twelve pounds ten for the lot.’

‘Very well,’ I answered. ‘I suppose you would not wrong me.’

He had turned to the articles, and was going over them with irritating attention.

‘Give me the money,’ I exclaimed, ‘and let me go.’

‘Twelve pounds ten for the lot!’ he cried again with a bounce.

‘Give me the money then,’ I said, rising.

In a lingering, reluctant way he went into the back room, and after a long interval, returned with a tin box. Opening it, he extracted a handful of gold, and proceeded to count me out twelve pounds ten shillings, so slowly that I could have pushed him off the stool.

‘There,’ said he, as he handed me the money, ‘count it.’

I did so to pacify him, for he was regarding the money with querulous anxiety. Putting the gold in my purse, I left the shop. On

reaching the market-place, I was accosted by a voice.

‘I hope t’ould man hasn’ taken you in, ’m?’

I turned, and met the grinning face of the man I had previously addressed.

‘My purchase was too slight to give him an opportunity,’ I answered. Then looking at his smiling countenance, expressive enough of honesty and good-nature, the idea struck me that he could supply me with the information I now required.

‘How far is it from here to Huddleston?’ I enquired.

He mused a long time before he answered. ‘Happen some eighty moile as t’crow floies.’

‘How can I get there?’ I next asked. (There was no such lace-work of railway in the North then as there is now.)

He reflected. ‘T’coach takin’ ye that woy cooms boy here twaice a week,’ he said. ‘Happen t’ll pass to-morrow.’

‘I cannot wait until to-morrow; I wish to go to-day—to start at once if possible.’ Another

long pause whilst he reflected. Then eyeing me all over, interrogating my apparel, it seemed, to conjecture thence the manner in which I would receive his suggestion, he said,

‘Jim Graham’s cart leaves here at twelve, if ye wanna moind goin’ by that.’

Graham! the name was ominous. But superstition must yield to necessity.

‘I don’t care what the conveyance is,’ I said, ‘so long as I am moving.’

‘Bill!’ he shouted. A small boy, staring like a Skye terrier through his tangled hair, emerged from under something. ‘Moind here whilst I gaws wi’ t’lady.’ Then motioning me to follow, he walked across the street. He led me about a couple of hundred yards; presently he halted opposite a small tavern. Desiring me to wait, he entered; and after a few minutes emerged, in company with a brawny red-nosed man, whom he introduced as Jim Graham. The object of my visit had obviously been communicated; for the brawny man approaching me with a jerk at his frieze skull-cap, asked me if

I would like to see his 'wehicle.' My assent entailed another walk. Off we started, and presently got to an archway, through which I perceived a covered cart.

'If t'looks on't doan't frighten yer, mum,' said the brawny man, 'it'll carry ye fur enough I guess.'

'It will do very well,' I said.

'I goes as fur as Sandgate,' he remarked. 'That's nigh twenta-four moile. T'coach passes in t'afternoon, an' ye can tak' that.'

'Couldn't you take me all the way?' I enquired eagerly.

'What, eighty moile! couldn't do't mum,' with a decisive shake of the head. 'Maister wants me back t'morro morn, wi' t'barley. That's what I'm goin' to fetch.'

I reflected; if I reached Sandgate, I should be twenty-four miles away from John Graham; should he think to pursue me, he would be unable to guess what road I had taken; and, at the very worst, should he reach Sandgate, I should probably be on the way to Huddle-

ston before he could follow me. I decided at once.

‘What will you charge to carry me to Sandgate?’ I asked.

The brawny man grinned, removed his hat and scratched his head whilst he pondered; eyed his companion speculatively, and at last said, ‘A pound, ’m.’

‘Very well,’ I answered.

He had probably expected that I should bargain; it was evidently a little speculation on his own account, and my prompt compliance pleased him.

‘I’ll put a truss o’ hay and a rug for you, ’m, to sit on,’ he said, readjusting his hat; ‘and ye’ll be more comfortable nor in t’coach. Happen t’gray mare trots well, an’ t’springs is easy as a feather bed. We’ll be leavin’ in half an hour, if ye’ll be here then.’

I promised to be punctual; and having rewarded my friend of the market-place for his useful civility, walked to a confectioner’s shop. Though without appetite, I was faint, and saw

that refreshment was imperative. Having eaten a little, and made some purchases by way of provision for the road, I remained waiting for mid-day to strike, attentively watched by the buxom lady behind the counter, who seemed wholly at a loss to determine who and what I was. At last I heard the welcome braying of the clock, and hastened to the rendezvous. A jolly stout mare, sleek as oil, tough and knotty as oak, was harnessed to the cart ; close by stood the brawny man.

‘ Now ’m,’ said he, ‘ if ye’ll gi’ me your hand.’

I was lightly raised—how tender, sometimes, is the touch of a rugged hand which seems made only for hewing trees or felling oxen !—and deposited in a very comfortable corner. The man jumped up in front ; he cracked his whip, the horse strained, the wheel turned ; and in a few minutes we had left the last row of gable-ended houses behind us, and were rolling at a fair pace through the open country.

The sun was hot ; the road stretched white behind. We crossed a broad bridge, beneath

which stagnated a canal, its peagreen water disturbed now by a gaudy-painted barge being slowly pulled to the south. There was a woman steering who smoked a pipe; I remember envying her air of perfect enjoyment, and the security which her situation suggested. As we advanced, the country grew fresher; hedges sometimes lined the road, scenting the still air with the perfume of wild roses; tall trees towered, around whose summits cawing rooks sailed in stately circles. The brawny man had lighted a pipe, and was busily diffusing its incense; at times he broke into a song, monotonous, but not without a certain rough music of its own. Rocked by the not ungentle jolting of the cart, soothed by the peaceful tramping of the horse's hoofs, I grew drowsy; my head nodded, and I slumbered.

When I awoke we were still moving; but I must have slept some time, for the sun had sunk low in the west, and the horse and cart made long lean shadows reaching beyond the road into the fields. I looked about me. Be-

hind us, at the distance of a mile or more, was a little village lying red and radiant in the sun ; we were passing a long wall, marking the boundaries of a large estate, the house belonging to which I could descry shining palely through the cool envelopment of rich foliage.

‘ How far are we from Sandgate ? ’ I enquired.

‘ Ah, ye’re awake,’ said the man, looking over his shoulder at me with a pleasant smile ; ‘ I hope as yer nap’s freshened ye, ’m ? ’

‘ Very much,’ I answered.

‘ Happen we’ll get t’ Sandgate by seven,’ he said, replying to my question. ‘ It’s a long spell for t’ould mare, but she’s used t’it ; ’ flicking the trotting animal with his whip.

I judged by the position of the sun that it was about six. In another hour, then, we should have reached our destination.


My sleep had certainly refreshed me ; it had done something more—it had given me an appetite. I untied my packet of purchases at the confectioner’s, and ate a portion of its contents with great relish. Ought I to have been

miserable? Probably yes. But I was not. On the contrary, a sense of safety, of freedom, of independence, was imparting a new life to my heart. I felt as the prisoner feels who has fought his way from a dungeon, having snapped the chain that yoked him to the wretch with whom he had been forced to lie. So hateful was the past, that it held my attention to it by the mere force of its malignant influence. I had no thoughts of the future, whilst the present was glad enough, for it was the glorious hour of emancipation, it was the triumphant guarantee of my power to act and to think for myself. Whatever forebodings might have risen, my young heart scattered them, as the jocund sun dispels the crawling mists that hang upon the skirts of the vanishing night.

Nor did I much fear my husband's pursuit. By the time he had left Lichendale, at which place he had told me he expected to be detained until a late hour, I should probably be at Sandgate. And then occurred the question, would he follow me? Would he not rather congratu-

tulate himself on having got rid of me? He had often told me how much my presence had hampered him; and though he had indeed proposed a scheme by which he designed to make me serve him, I would not believe that he had so seriously entertained it as to care much about its being thwarted by my absence. I amused or rather terrified myself by picturing his feelings when he should return home and find me gone. He would be violent at first; he would chase furiously about the house seeking me; he would put all kinds of enquiries to the servant in his fierce way; then reflection would follow; he would comprehend at last that he had rendered my life unendurable; that the gentle, timid girl whom he had married had been transformed by his bad nature into a resolute, daring woman. Savage at the success of my action, exultant at being so cheaply freed of a woman whom he had made himself hate, he would curse me. Would this be so?

The cart rolled on. The sun threw level beams, its dying glory yielding to a gathering



darkness in the east, on whose pulseless breast beamed a single but a gorgeous gem. The dew fell noiseless as the shadows; the birds were grouping on the trees; unseen sheep were baaing for the fold.

‘There’s Sandgate!’ cried the brawny man.

I looked; we had turned a bend of the road, high-banked, thick-hedged, and right in front of us lay the town. It grew quickly upon us, soon the wheels began to rattle.

‘Where shall I put ye down, ’m?’ asked my companion.

‘At any quiet, respectable inn,’ I answered.

‘T’ “Croon” ’ll suit you,’ he said: He flogged the jaded horse into a brisker pace, and before long halted. Descending, he lifted me out; and looking about me, I discovered myself at the door of a neat, clean little hotel. Thanking the man for his attention, I paid him the sovereign, and pushing open a pair of glass folding doors, entered the house.

I should probably have met with but little civility of reception from the landlord had he

remarked the vehicle in which I had arrived ; as it was, he stared at me with much curiosity on my demanding accommodation. He had an eye which belongs to a man who thinks himself sharp ; an eye of the colour of a cairngorm. Oh, to be sure I could have a bedroom ; oh yes ; and supper too, at once if I chose. He was sorry there was no ladies' coffee-room, but there was a snug private parlour, if that would suit me. Prefer it in the bedroom ? Oh, certainly. The chop should be brought to me in my bedroom.

That night I went to bed early. My apartment was dainty and pure in its *entourage* of spotless dimity and pretty chintz. My sleep in the cart had but temporarily soothed my fatigue ; now I was overcome with weariness. I was hardly in bed before I slept ; such a sleep—so dreamless, so restful, so profound—I had not enjoyed for a long time.

CHAPTER XII.

SANDGATE is a large town ; too large to be pretty, not large enough to be fine ; and much too new to be picturesque. Old houses there are of course ; one fronts my window, supported on either side by a buxom building, like an old woman leaning on the arms of her daughters. But I can see that there is a great deal of newness about ; the builder is busy ; the smell of mortar rises. Progress has planted her right foot here, and the Picturesque lies expiring beneath her heel.

I have pulled the crisp dimity aside from the window, and am peering over the short muslin curtain. The sunlight lies upon the road ; hens are walking with long strides in circles, or scratching the barren dust for grain. There is

a row of small private dwelling-houses a little way down the street, with gardens in front variously decorated according to the various execrable tastes of their owners. Whilst I dress myself I watch a stout man in one of the gardens digging. He digs meditatively, pausing at intervals to regard the soil as a painter falls back from his easel to consider his canvas. There is a moist, impertinent happiness in the man's face, an emotion that exudes rather than engraves, which must be dreadfully insulting to beggars or a mourner in a funeral procession. His face tells me his story, and his story is brief: he has a good appetite; he has a good connection, considering that he is one of twelve linendrapers in the town; the house he lives in is his own; and he pays cash for what he has. From his standpoint I should say life has nothing more to offer in the way of enjoyment.

There is a tap at my door, and a chambermaid enquires whether I would like to breakfast in my bedroom. No; I will breakfast

down stairs. I descend, fare sumptuously off new-laid eggs and strong coffee, and then proceed to make some necessary enquiries. For this purpose I take the landlord, whom I perceive hanging about the lobby, into my confidence.

‘Can you tell me,’ I ask, ‘at what time the coach from —— passes here?’

‘It’s due here at this door at a quarter-past four, mum,’ he answers, with a bow.

‘And where does it stop? I mean, which is its final destination?’

Rubbing his hands he names Huddleston. I enquire the distance of Huddleston, hoping it is not so great as I heard it was at Hunton. Being very anxious to be polite, he is very anxious to be exact; so he vanishes through a door, reappearing after an interval with the announcement that it is a matter of sixty miles happen a little less.

It has occurred to me that if I want to procure a situation as governess, I must seek opportunities in a large place. The larger the

population, I argue, the greater must necessarily be the demand. I might hunt down and explore twenty such towns as Sandgate and Lichendale, from the first house to the last, without meeting with anyone requiring my services. What is more, I cannot afford to wait long; my purse is scanty, and what little it contains I could wish to carry with me to a situation, that I might enlarge the absurdly small wardrobe I had brought away from the cottage. I decide, then, to travel the whole distance by the coach. Two essential purposes it will effect: it will remove me far from John Graham, and convey me to a town offering, for aught I know, fair chances of employment.

‘There’s a railroad,’ said the landlord, ‘opened two month ago at Jortin, which be interfering bad with the coach. It takes you direct to Huddleston. I hain’t travelled that way myseln, and dunnot wish to, not believin’ in lokermotives, which I am told there is nothing more dangerous. But if yer likes to risk it,

mum, it'll save yer a day, and it's cheaper nor the coach. When might you be leavin'?'

'This afternoon,' I answered.

'Should yer decide to go by the railroad, I can let you have a fly there for three and sixpence.'

'No; I prefer the coach,' I answered. The truth was, I had no wish to disturb my programme.

I returned to the parlour, which had been placed at my disposal, and gathering some journals and newspapers about me, which I had discovered piled on a small sideboard, I did my best to while away the time. I had no curiosity to saunter out; I disliked the idea of being stared at, which I feared would be my fate whether I veiled myself or not; and what was more, I was not so far from John Graham that I could act without great caution. The little dinner I had ordered offered a welcome diversion; I lingered over it as long as I could; and then, as the afternoon was advancing, prepared myself for my journey.

A clock on the mantelpiece at last warned me that the hour that was to bring the stage-coach was at hand. My bill was moderate, and having discharged it, I took my parcel and stood at the folding glass-door until the coach should draw up. A group of idlers on the narrow pavement attested its approach; soon I heard the rattle of wheels coming down the street at a sharp pace; I pushed open the doors and stood beneath the porch as the vehicle, drawn by three panting horses, halted amid a clattering of suddenly-arrested hoofs.

I was about to step forward to secure a seat, when I saw a tall figure leap quickly from the interior. I gazed and recoiled; my head swam, my heart turned sick, and but for the support of a strong arm I should have fallen.

‘So here you are,’ said a familiar voice. ‘I am glad you have not obliged me to go further. Come, this meeting is really lucky.’

I looked up. John Graham stood over me, with his hard, bitter smile upon his lips, his

fierce eyes, his scowling brow. I made an effort to strengthen myself on my feet.

‘Let me go!’ I faintly cried.

‘Go where?’ he asked.

The people around were too much occupied with the coach, too busy with the relays, to heed us. I felt my arm drawn through Graham’s and my hand grasped by his. In a few moments I was being led away.

‘I hope *you* have enjoyed your holiday?’ he said. ‘Out of compliment to me, however, you might have made me acquainted with your determination. You have made me very nervous—very nervous.’ He laughed harshly.

‘Let me go!’ I cried again, making an effort to draw my arm from his.

‘Nonsense. Don’t struggle like that. I have you now, and I’ll take care you don’t leave me again.’

A bird fluttering in an iron trap might have made such ineffectual efforts to struggle into liberty as I. He bore me rapidly up one street and down another—almost at a running pace.

Suddenly he paused before a tavern. Pushing open the door, he entered, dragging me in after him. A sand floor ; a strong smell of beer ; a bar presided over by a stout woman ; an old man at a slippery-looking table in the corner, smoking, with a mug of ale before him—this was the scene.

‘Can you let me have a bedroom?’ asked my husband.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered the woman.

‘Lead me to it.’

The woman rose, conducted us up an uncarpeted wooden staircase (he still held my arm in his in a vice-like squeeze), and ushered us into a large, dingy room, smelling warm and musty.

‘This will do,’ said he, looking around him and releasing my arm. ‘What is your charge for a night?’

‘Two and sixpence.’

‘Very well. At six o’clock let us have some tea. Cook two chops, and let the tea be strong.’

The woman curtseyed and withdrew. Ad-

vancing to the door he examined it. There was a key in the lock ; he withdrew it, and inserting it in the inside, turned it ; the bolt shot easily.

‘ This will detain you, I think,’ he exclaimed, patting the key. ‘ Come, sit down ; remove your bonnet ; we are here for the night you know.’

I did as he commanded. He seated himself on the edge of the bed.

‘ A coach passes here to-morrow at noon. We will return by it. A fly would cost me too much, or we should be off at once. What made you leave me ?’

By this time my faintness had worn off. A despair, making my face hard, keeping my teeth clenched and my hands closed, had taken possession of me. I would not answer him ; I would not look at him. I sat doggedly, fearing nothing, hating all things, and life most. He marked my manner, but would not repeat his question, thinking I should soften presently.

‘ Should you resolve to leave me again,’ he

went on after a little, 'let me advise you to lay your plans more cleverly. Had you really wanted to escape, you would have gone round the moors to Lichendale. That would have thrown me off the track ; I should never have given you sense enough to have taken my route. I judged rightly. No sooner did I find you had left me than I started for Hunton. There I heard what I required to hear.'

I sat mute.

'Shall I tell you what you did at Hunton ? You may like to hear. You first enquired for a jeweller's ; having found one, you sold your jewellery. You then enquired about the stage-coach ; and having ascertained that it did not run until to-day, paid a carter a sovereign to bring you to this place. You seem to have thoroughly impressed your friend of the market-place. He took me for your lover whom you had run away from your home to elope with. I suppose you were not aware of my detective genius ?' He laughed drily ; then got up and commenced pacing the room.

I sat staring blankly out on the sky.

‘What made you leave me?’ he presently said.

I did not answer. He marched up to me, paused, and repeated the question. I turned my head slowly, eyed him with all the scorn and hate of reckless misery, and then let my head sink. My glance and my silence made him very angry. He brought his hand heavily on my shoulder, and shook me savagely.

‘Answer me!’ he roared, applying a foul epithet to me.

Maddened by the insult and the clutch that had resembled a blow, I sprang to my feet.

‘How dare you!’ I cried, my eyes blazing, my cheeks scarlet.

‘Will you answer me?’ he cried, approaching me with a menacing stride.

‘Why did I leave you?’ I answered. ‘Because I hated you and feared you; because your bad nature tainted and poisoned the air I breathed; because you were breaking my heart; because——’

‘Well?’ he said through his teeth, observing my abrupt pause.

‘Add what you will and what you know—it will explain my conduct,’ I said, sullenly turning away.

He grasped me by the arm, and looked me fiercely in the face.

‘What do I know?—what do you mean?’ he asked.

I set my teeth; I would not answer him. He let go my arm and recommenced his pacing to and fro. Presently he came close to me again.

‘Did you see me leave the cottage yesterday morning?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘You were watching me?’

‘Yes?’

‘Ha! You saw me pause on leaving the garden?’

‘I did.’

‘What did you infer from my hesitation?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Think.’

‘Nothing,’ I repeated, beginning to wonder.

‘You’re a liar!’ he exclaimed fiercely. ‘You knew that something was wrong. Something *was* wrong. I meant to question you about it; that made me pause. But I found I should be too late for the meeting if I waited, and therefore resolved to defer it until my return. Can you guess what I am going to say?’

I fancied I could. I felt myself growing pale; his fiery eyes burned upon mine. A light livid hue, as he marked the change in my face, overcrept his.

‘I keep my money in the cabinet in the study. *That* you know. Yesterday morning when I opened the drawer I found indications of a strange hand there. The indications were faint; I lingered musing over them. I could not be sure; but my instincts foreshadowed something. I am *sure* now. What did you want there?’

‘I wanted money to enable me to leave you.’

‘You meant to rob me?’

‘I meant to take a small sum. It would have been no robbery, for you have an ample equivalent in my furniture, which you talk of selling.’

My throat was constricted; I was bathed in a damp perspiration; but my effort to speak daringly made me more defiant in my air than I wished to appear. He did not remove his eyes from my face as he continued to question.

‘What did you find in that drawer?’

‘Gold and bank-notes.’

‘How much gold?’

‘I do not know; I did not count.’

‘You counted the bank-notes?’

‘I did. There were thirty.’

He saw by my manner that I suspected, that I knew all. He stood before me irresolute—ignorant how to act, what to do. Almost cowed he seemed; the corners of his mouth twitched; he breathed in short, convulsive jerks. Suddenly he set off marching to and fro. I resumed my seat at the window, staring at the

sky. I was in the reckless mood which is only possible to blank despair.

By and by he paused before me.

‘Well?’ he said

I glanced at him, then averted my eyes.

‘I am never wrong in my suspicions,’ he exclaimed, breathing fitfully, and speaking low; ‘I *felt* that you knew it; I guessed you suspected it from the moment I saw you with that paper in your hand.’ He paused, and then added, ‘Well?’

I glanced again at him, again quickly averted my eyes.

‘Knowing is suffering; you have heard that,’ he pursued. ‘You have gained much knowledge; you must prepare for much suffering. Henceforth you and I will never be apart. I will stick to you faster than your shadow—as closely. With *that* in your breast you must never be trusted from my sight. Death may relieve you, but only death. You know your doom. I will not sell the cottage; it is lonely; it will serve me better than a dwelling in the

city. Guess the rest. By G—! you have forced a mission on me; I'll fulfil it!'

He moved restlessly about the room muttering to himself. The evening was falling; I heard the sound of drunken voices wrangling in the tap-room beneath; my gaze was fixed on the sky with such a stony stare as is seen in the blank eyes of statues. Presently there was a low rap on the door; he started, and hurriedly turned the key. The stout woman entered, bearing the tea-tray, which she set upon a table, and retired. He fell to the repast at once; eating not hungrily, but like an animal, because the food was there. As for me, the least mouthful would have choked me.

His repast concluded, he rose and continued his restless perambulations. The shadows gathered; I watched a man light a lamp in the street; in the houses opposite lights began to shine through the curtained windows. I saw a bat sweep by like a ghost; some children passed down the street singing; and at intervals a

drunken chorus rose and died in the room beneath.

Suddenly his voice broke out :

‘I’ll not stop here to-night. You’ll be safer at home. A fly shall take us there. I’ll not trust you in a stage-coach.’

I did not turn my head.

He lingered a little. I think he was looking around him, speculating perhaps as to the opportunities for flight offered by the apartment. Apparently satisfied he took his hat, and, without a word, left the room, closing the door and locking it. I heard him withdraw the key, his footsteps sounded upon the wooden staircase ; peering into the street, I presently saw his tall figure emerge and stride rapidly into the gloom.

I left my chair and ran to the door ; I turned the handle and pulled violently ; the door was as immovable as the wall. I must escape now. I must get out of this place by some means or other. I looked around me ; the room was square, with a window looking on to the street,

another window to the right. To this I ran; gazing through it I perceived that it overlooked a garden walled off from the street; this garden was bounded by the wall of a house and a long low wooden fence. How far it extended to my right I could not see; judging from its thick growth of vegetables it probably belonged to a market-gardener. I flung the sash up and looked down. To leap it was impossible; the height I could not guess; but I foresaw that the inevitable consequences of a jump would be to inflict some injury—a broken limb, an internal rupture—which, if it did not kill me outright, would wholly prevent my escape.

I was in despair. Every moment was priceless, for every moment I expected his return. Should I alarm the house, state my position to the landlady, and bribe her to aid my escape? The idea was feasible had time allowed; but before I could leave the room the door would have to be broken; before she would allow the door to be broken a parley would be necessary, and when my demand to

be set free should have met with her approval, aid would have to be sought to force the lock. How many minutes would it take to acquaint the woman with my situation? what fiction was I to invent to account for my imprisonment? Oh, long before the story could be planned and related, and the door forced, he would have returned.

All at once an idea entered my head. How it occurred I know not; I might have somewhere read of such an expedient having been adopted. Necessity, that genuine mother of invention, might have suggested it. I ran to the bed, pulled off the sheets, and cutting the hem with my teeth, tore them into broad strips. These strips I knotted together, and produced a stout rope. One extremity I attached to the bedpost, the other I threw out of window. I then upset a chair, disordered the toilet table, and filled the room with such details as might suggest a hasty flight. Do you think I meant to lower myself by this improvised rope? Not I. I had read of such things having been done

by heroines in order to elope with their lovers ; but though I was urged by a passion more stimulating than love, I would no more have attempted such an impracticable exploit with my weak hands and swimming head, than I would have attempted to scale the Peak of Teneriffe. I looked about me for a hiding-place. Should I crawl under the French bedstead ? should I secrete myself in the cupboard ? Let me seek the most obvious hiding-place in the room ; the hiding-place offering so poor a chance of concealment that no one would dream of searching it. The blankets lay piled upon the bed ; putting on my bonnet and shawl, and taking my parcel, I mounted the mattress, and crept beneath the blankets, covering myself completely in them, and lying curled in as small and compact a round as, proportionately speaking, you have ever seen achieved by your kitten asleep on the hearthrug.

I do not know how long I thus lay ; time passes slowly under such conditions. I grew intolerably hot, and though a single blanket.

only covered me, soon experienced great difficulty in breathing. Before long—the sounds striking my ears as if my head were under water—I heard the rattling of wheels; the noise abruptly ceased; footsteps sounded; a key grated in the lock; the bolt flew, and the door was flung open. The room shook to the heavy steps of a man running across the floor; he had made for the window, and, by the pause that followed, I judged that he was looking out. The room shook again; his noisy boots clattered upon the hollow-sounding staircase; the noise grew faint—fainter—died. I threw off the blanket, stole to the door and listened. I heard a deep voice below questioning; replies, audible in murmurs, mounted. Step by step I glided below, soundless as a mist creeping down a mountain. It was dark, and I had to grope my way; but a light shone presently when I reached the narrow passage through a pane of glass over the door. This was the private entrance to the place; the tap through which we had entered adjoined it. Fortunately

for me the door was pretty crowded, and crowded by an order of men who are not more remarkable for melodious accents than for genteel adjectives. A labourer was hoarsely affirming the possibility of producing a cement which could be used on the frostiest day : dissentient voices broke in, gruffer than the growling of mastiffs, creating for me a protection of sound under which I could move with little fear of being overheard. The street-door opened easily ; I peered out, gazed up and down the street ; a cab stood at the tavern-door, but no one was with it ; the driver had, no doubt, entered the public-house. Perceiving no shadow move, I crept forth, and hurried away.

I turned to the left ; for the garden into which I was supposed to have escaped lay to the right ; and in that neighbourhood my husband would of course be searching for me. I dared not run for fear of attracting notice ; and this time he must have no clue to the direction I had taken. After I had gone a little way down the street, I turned sharply off to the

right. There were no lamps ; half-finished houses, skeletoned by scaffolding, stood grim and drear on either side ; the road was clayey, and the moist soil stuck in clods to my boots. I pushed bravely forward and came to a hedge, marking the boundary of some extensive meadow-lands. Pursuing the thin path that skirted it, I arrived at a wicket, over which I climbed, not being able to open it, and found myself in a fair high road. I paused a moment or two to look about me, and guess, if I could, the direction I was taking. The town I had left lay behind me diffusing a yellow mist of light upon the black air. There was no moon ; but the sky was so thickly charged with stars that the firmament looked like a veil through which beamed in diamond-points the lustre of a mighty white light shining behind it. One constellation I knew--the Great Bear. I had often viewed it at this hour from the cottage, and papa, I remembered, once told me that the Pointers directly indicated the position of Lichendale from our home. I gazed at them

now, and remarked that they pointed in an opposite direction to what I was taking. Grateful to the chance that had conducted me to a road leading straight away from the accursed neighbourhood I had fled, I commenced running. Swiftly I went, making the tall sombre trees, sentinelling the highway, glide rapidly by me, and quickly dimming the lustrous haze of the town. Breathless and panting at last, though unwearied, I paused ; and having recovered myself, started off again at a brisk walk.

I pushed on actively and unflaggingly, never remitting my speed for an instant, feeling no weariness, animated only by one feeling, that every step I took carried me further from John Graham, and diminished his chance of capturing me. The road was straight as a line ; hilly at intervals, and carrying me through a country almost treeless. Meanwhile the moon had risen ; a broad red disk, diffusing as yet no radiance, but suggesting a sense of companionship that was almost comforting. Throughout the long walk I met no human creature ; at

wide ranges I passed a house bordering on the roadside, standing dark and silent as though untenanted.

Suddenly I espied lights at a distance; a narrow galaxy marking a village or hamlet. The place seemed further off than it was; for I neared it rapidly. Soon I came upon small outposts of lampless houses, a little church, a long oblong building fronted by two lamps. The square door was closed; over it was the inscription, traced in white letters on a red board, 'Railway Station.' This then must be Jortin? I recollected what the hotel-keeper had told me of the railway having been opened to this place, and the distance I had walked seemed to coincide with his intimation. Was there a train leaving that night I wondered? If so, I would take it. I looked about me for some one to question, but the place was vacant as a Necropolis. I walked on; the houses thickened, and formed themselves into a street. Presently I came to a tavern, brilliantly lighted; I approached it, and hearing sounds of voices,

boldly pushed the door open and entered. Two men reclined against the counter conversing with a man behind it in shirt-sleeves. They stared at me as I went in.

‘I have missed the coach,’ I said briefly; ‘and being very anxious to reach Huddleston by to-morrow, have walked here to catch a train if possible. Do you know when the next train leaves?’

‘There’s a train at a quarter past three to-morrow mornin’,” answered the landlord civilly.

‘At a quarter past three?’ I said, eyeing a clock. ‘Do you know when it reaches Huddleston?’

‘At about eight o’clock, I should say; shouldn’t you, Joe?’

The man thus addressed answered with a nod.

‘You look pretty used up,’ said the landlord commiseratingly. ‘Won’t you set down and rest yourself?’

I thanked him for his civility.

‘It’s hardly worth my while going to a hotel,’

I added, perceiving that it was long past nine.
‘Is there no waiting-room in the station?’

‘There is a waitin’-room’, was the reply,
‘but it won’t be opened till twelve.’ Then surveying me: ‘We don’t close here till twelve. If you’ll accept of it, you’re welcome to rest in the parlour till then.’

I gratefully accepted his offer, and was conducted to a snug little room at the back, the two men standing erect as I passed with every demonstration of respect. (I have heard a good deal of the coarseness and brutality of our English lower classes; but I record it here as one speaking from experience, that the most sympathetic kindness, the rude but most cordial and generous attention I have ever received, have been at their hands.) Having ordered some refreshment, which was promptly served me, I threw myself on a broad old-fashioned sofa, and, thoroughly worn out, fell fast asleep.

I was aroused by the soft touch of a woman.

‘We’re closin’ here for the night, miss,’ said

she ; ' but the waitin'-room's open ; and I'll take ye to 't if ye'll follow.'

I started up, and accompanied her into the night. The square door of the oblong building gaped ; through it I perceived a row of railway carriages. There was a porter, evidently just awake, lighting a large central lamp. The woman seemed to know him.

'Jem,' she said, ' here's a young lady goin' by th' train. She'll be more comfortable in t'carriage nor in t'waitin'-room. She's tired out, an' can sleep wi'out bein' waked when t' train starts. Can't you put her in, Jem ?'

The woman was comely ; she spoke seductively ; she might have been Jem's sweetheart ; or more probably her influence over Jem was due to her position at the tavern.

'I'll put her in,' he said, bringing a key out of his pocket ; ' but how about her ticket ?'

' O, she can pay when she gets out,' answered the woman. ' There can be no mistake. They'll know she cannot come further nor Jortin.'

' What class, please ?' said the porter.

Never having travelled by railroad in my life, I was at a loss to answer him. He repeated his question, adding—

‘First or second? there ain’t no third to this train.’

‘First,’ said I, at hap-hazard.

He opened the door of a carriage; I entered and sunk into soft cushions. ‘Any luggage?’ he asked; I shook my head. I gave my hand to the woman, thanking her warmly for her friendliness; she saluted me with a pleasant smile and withdrew. I saw her and the porter hold a small *tête-à-tête* before she finally departed. I was evidently the topic of their conversation, and they were amusing themselves with conjecturing who and what I was. The porter grew humorous; the girl tittered and cried, ‘Don’t, Jem!’ Then he grew amorous, performing a little dumb-show, from which I inferred he was offering or meditating a kiss. This the girl repelled by an echoing smack on the cheek, and, with a merry laugh, vanished.

I was secure now. My spirits were buoyant;

my heart swelled in gratitude to my Maker for the protection He had vouchsafed me through my perils. And yet I could hardly realise what I had passed through ; it was too recent to be determinable ; too dream-like to be credible. I wrapped my jacket around me, placed my feet on the opposite cushion, and propping myself cosily in the corner, soon began to nod in sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE platform of a railway station well-gravelled; a long wooden shed-like structure, hung or plastered with advertisements; a wide opening, through which can be seen a row of various kinds of vehicles; to right and left an arrowy line of rail cutting into the deep country, spanned by white arches, shone over by a glorious blue sky; a palisade bearing on its centre a board inscribed with the word 'Huddleston'; a few figures on the platform; a row of children dangling their naked legs over a low wall, cheering the train as it slowly moves out with a scream and a succession of epileptic snorts.

I have paid a very stern official in alarming gilt buttons the first-class fare from Jortin to

Huddleston, and have received from his eye (in which blazes an epitome of the railway company's bye-laws) a sharp reproof for having neglected to procure a ticket in the proper fashion ; I have counted the money there is left in my purse, and find the sum amounts to nine pounds five shillings ; I have mused awhile, endeavouring to ascertain on which side of the line Huddleston lies ; and have, after a pretty long interval, walked out of the station into the broad, bright, sparkling morning, deaf to the Abyssinian chorus that salutes me from the mob of fly-drivers. I pass quickly down a rather steep footway, and walk towards the town, which I hear I may reach by keeping straight on.

My unrefreshing sleep in the railway carriage has left me very wearied, and I am parched with thirst. There is a little hotel at the corner of the street, with its doorway surmounted by a gilt calf. I make my way to it, and enter. I see by the clock in the hall that it is half-past eight. There is a man cleaning a window,

there is another man cleaning a lamp ; on each side of me doors are wide open, and in each room I perceive people busily dusting and sweeping. A waiter, who, by his crumpled faded appearance, looks as if he had gone to bed in his clothes, neckcloth and all, advances flourishing a napkin, and makes me an interrogative bow. I order breakfast, and desire to be conducted to a bedroom. My toilette performed, I lose a great deal of my weariness ; and descending, am conducted by the waiter to a pretty little coffee-room, surrounded by small tables draped in spotless white, glittering with highly-polished cutlery, and each laden with a freshly-culled nosegay. My breakfast I find very relishable—everything is so fresh, so clean, so sweet. My enjoyment, however, is somewhat marred by the waiter, who hovers about me with needless assiduity. I am sorry I have laid aside my bonnet and veil, for there is an absurd leer in the fellow's eye, which I am quite sure he cannot help, but which distresses me to think I should provoke.

‘Are there any local papers published here?’
I enquire.

‘O yes, ’m,’ he answers with alacrity.

‘Can you let me see one : one containing advertisements?’

‘O yes, ’m.’

He does not retire, but stands watching me. I grow a little nervous. He presently advances, clasps his hands, and exclaims with a feeble smile :

‘By the way, ’m ; *what* might you mean by lokul?’

I can hardly suppress a laugh. ‘I mean any papers published in the town?’

‘O, I see ’m. There are three ; two comes out on Saturdays and one on Wednesdays. Which might you wish to see?’

I name the one published on Wednesday. He retires, and I rise to put on my bonnet. My face looks wan and worn ; not haggard, but faded, like a flower long deprived of water. But my eyes are lustrous, my lips are full ; and already I seem to trace the stylet of life in cer-

tain lines about my lineaments, and faint touches giving determination and almost a new character to my features. The waiter returns, hands me a paper, and, pulling my veil a little over my face, I begin to explore the printed sheet. What I seek I easily find. My eye runs down a long list under the heading of 'Apartments to Let.' I call for a pencil and paper, and note a few addresses; this achieved, I recur once again to the advertisements, but this time do not find what I want. As in the 'Lichendale Advertiser,' so in the 'Huddleston Examiner,' the name of governess does not once occur. I call for my bill, discharge it, and leave the house, very admiringly bowed out by the waiter.

My mission now is to seek for No. 12 Theodore Street. The advertisement tells me it is near All Saints' Church. Where is All Saints' Church? I enquire of an old woman, and receive certain instructions, which I follow, and presently enter the street I seek. No. 12 is before me—a fat detached little house, swollen

with bay windows ; obeying the injunctions of a tiny plate on the door, I knock and ring. A very respectable-looking middle-aged woman, in a clean coarse apron, receives me.

‘I have seen,’ I commence, ‘by your advertisement that you have lodgings to let here. Your terms suit me ; can I see the rooms ?’

She has a pale eye, but there is no inquisitiveness in it. She merely drops a little curtsey and opens the door wider to admit me. She conducts me into a small parlour, looking very tidy in muslin curtains and new damask tablecloth. I next inspect the bedroom ; small indeed, but thoroughly comfortable. I decide at once to take them, and having done so enter into the following explanation.

‘I have come to Huddleston to seek a situation as governess. You will therefore see that the time I may desire to occupy your apartments is subject to my chance of finding a place. All the luggage I have is comprised in this paper parcel,’ laying the package on the


table, whilst she opened her eyes. ‘I can quite understand your surprise ; but you will not, I am sure, require me to tell you more than this : that, having been very badly treated at home, I have run away ; and that, though I have money enough to tide me over for the present, I have no wish nor chance to receive any help from those I have left when my money is spent. I must, therefore, seek employment ; I am a perfect stranger in this place, and do not know a soul in it. This is my story. You have a kind face ; it invites my confidence, and I give it you freely.’

‘Pray take a seat, miss,’ she exclaimed. ‘I quite understand you. Lord ! what a bad thing a hard home is ! It’s drove many an honest girl to sin—many a one, as I know to my cost. *My* home was a hard one too, miss. I married and saved myself ; but my sister, though she was long courted, and by a farmer, too, as ‘ud ha’ made a lady of her—which, though it’s not for me to speak, would ha’ been liftin’ her to what she was born to—couldn’t abear father’s

conduct, and left us one night, and was never heard of since.'

'A good beginning!' I mentally exclaimed. 'My tale is credited, and I have found a sympathetic landlady.' She seemed a lonely body, and appeared to take most flatteringly to me at once. Before long she had made me acquainted with most of the details of her history; telling me of her husband, of his death, of the illness of her child, of her struggles, of her rent, and of her prospects—which, poor thing! I found were meagre enough, her dream being to save money enough to take a lodging-house in London, where she was very sure she would speedily make her fortune.


She made me quite at home. I was a welcome relief to the monotony of her life, for it seemed that her lodgings did not let well, there being only two London gentlemen 'she could depend on, who came regularly every year for a month's shooting.' The well-dressed cutlet she set before me for my dinner satisfied me that I had fallen in good hands; and I was sensible of



a certain motherly solicitude in her manner which fell like balm upon my bruised soul, breathing to my companionless heart a soft assurance of kindness and concern.

That evening I sat alone in my little apartment. A candle diffused a sufficient light ; on the table was a pile of books which my landlady—her name was Mrs. Shaw—had brought me from her room below. I could not read ; I could only think. I thought of John Graham—of his rage on finding I had again escaped him, and this time effectually. That resolve of his—that he would adhere to me more closely than my shadow, that he would never suffer me to be absent from him—of what value was it now ? And then I wondered how far this baleful presence which (in my mood of self-conceit that had not suffered me to reflect) I had so madly, so wantonly conjured would influence my future ? Would his sinister shadow ever again cross my path ? Strange world is this : so huge to those who seek a friend, so narrow to those who fly a foe !

Though a wide, wide interval separated me from this man, I felt that the space between us was too short by many a mile yet. I found comfort, though, in one reflection: were he a rich man I did not doubt that he would spend his whole life seeking me, employing skilful emissaries, starting subtle agents in my pursuit, and never resting until he had found me; for he knew that I, of all the millions in this great world, was the only one that possessed his secret; and that mission which he had said my discovery of his crime had imposed upon him—that mission to place it beyond my power ever to impart my knowledge—he would strive to fulfil, whilst his brain continued to prompt and his limbs to act. But he was a poor man. That gold, those notes, crimsoned by the blood of murder, could not last long. To gain a living he would have to enter some employment that must detain him in one place; without money his revenge was idle paltering—his determination to capture me a hopeless resolve. So I believed.



Thinking of the past brought me to reflect upon the future. How was I to act? My search for a situation as governess might be vain, and whilst I sought my money would be spent. Should I actually have at last to hire myself out as a servant! Who would employ me in that capacity, if it ever came to my seeking it? With my white hands, my educated manners, my beauty, no one would credit my tale. I should be dismissed as an impostor. Virtuous wives might suspect insidious designs; and one bitter repulse, one expressed doubt, one glance of scorn, would, I feared, chill me into despairing inactivity, and leave me without the faintest energy to urge, the faintest hope to incite.

Mrs. Shaw, entering the room with a small loaf and butter which I had requested for supper, disturbed my reverie.


‘Do sit and talk with me, Mrs. Shaw,’ I exclaimed, raising to her face a pair of melancholy eyes, dimmed with tears that had insensibly gathered; ‘I feel so lonely and wretched.’

‘Oh, you must cheer up,’ she said, taking a chair at a respectful distance; ‘it never does to despair. There’s night an’ day in life, just as there is the twenty-four hours. You’ll be getting out of the night soon into the daylight, I’m sure. You’ll make your way, miss; for you’ve a bonny face.’

‘I oughtn’t to despair, I know,’ I answered; ‘but just now everything seems very hopeless; I can’t see my way at all; I don’t know what will become of me.’

‘You ought to find a place as governess, I am sure. You’re well eddicated, I suspect.’

‘Educated well enough to render me competent to teach children. I know French and English, and can read Italian. I can draw, too—not well, but well enough to show others how to draw better. I don’t know music, though I can play the piano and sing,’ I went on, finding a pleasure in rehearsing my qualifications. ‘I shall be called upon to repeat them soon in earnest,’ I thought; and thereat hope freshened up, and my depression grew lighter.



‘I was thinkin’ this evening,’ began Mrs. Shaw, ‘that it might be worth your while to make some enquiries at a registry office which has been opened here. To be sure, it’s meant for the hiring o’ servants; but it may happen they’ll know some one as is wantin’ a governess. The fee’s three shillins’, I fancy: so Mrs. Trundle was tellin’ me. She called it downright robbery. To be sure it looks like it.’

‘Why?’ I exclaimed eagerly, for the suggestion came fraught with hope.

‘You see—I’m a quotin’ Mrs. Trundle—^{*}them registry offices pitches in a place where the proprietors has a few friends. A servant calls, says Mrs. Trundle. Well, she pays her three shillins’, her name’s wrote down, or happen she’s sent at once to one o’ the proprietor’s friends. The friend is up to the art, says Mrs. Trundle; tells the servant he is very sorry, but is just suited. The servant goes back to the office, and the proprietor he sends her to another friend. Here, says Mrs. Trundle, the same game’s gone through; the friend is just suited,

.

and the servant begins to weary. When she's done it a third time she's so sick as she'll not try it again. So the proprietor has the three shillins' and the servant nothink.'

This view of the case was disheartening enough ; but I liked the suggestion, and thought it worth trying. I had an idea that they would treat governesses better than servants, and the project at all events offered the chance of bringing me in contact with people who might be of service. What was an essential recommendation, it promised action. To be up and doing would be sap and sinew to my being just now. Inactivity was dreadful to me, as a symbol of hopelessness. I retired to bed early, being in sad need of a sound night's repose. Mrs. Shaw hovered about me to the last, not leaving me until I was fairly in bed. Under any other conditions I should probably have found her attentions somewhat officious, but just now I was wonderfully grateful to her.

I passed the long hours in a dreamless sleep—

so deep, so calm, so restful, I might have been dead. From ten until eight the next morning I slumbered; then awoke refreshed and strengthened. Fitful flashes of sunlight fell and faded on the window-blind; I looked out and saw great piles of clouds being swept through a blue sky by a gale which sounded a continuous thunder about the house, and made a row of elms at the back toss their arms to the heavens in an agony of supplication. I was soon dressed, and, my breakfast being despatched, made ready for my walk to the registry-office.

The office was at least a mile and a half from Theodore Street. My directions from Mrs. Shaw were explicit, and I sallied forth with little fear of missing my way. My heart throbbed as I walked along; I feared disappointment; I was troubled by the position in which I had placed myself. The novelty that surrounded me pressed somewhat heavily on my spirits. Strangers on all sides of me; strangers on the pavements, strangers in the shops; strange faces of men and women intent

on their pursuits; strange faces of loungers staring at me as I passed; strange buildings, strange names of streets, strange churches. The town was large—large enough to be a city. At its confines tall chimneys poured black clouds of smoke upon the gale; a canal chased its western suburbs—doubtless the canal over which I had passed on my way to Sandgate. The streets were broad; the houses looked new; the shops wore an air of opulence, with their handsome displays showing through their plate-glass windows. The vulgarity of mere wealth was everywhere apparent, but chiefly conspicuous in the lavishly-decorated fronts of many of the larger buildings. It was a town, I imagined, as I gazed about me, rich in everything but education and good-breeding; having for its society rich tradespeople living in the big houses I had seen scattered in the outskirts, all hospitable, good-natured, and vulgar.

I came at last to the street I sought, and perceiving the office, opened the door and entered. It was a small room, by rights the parlour of

the little villa, with a square table in the centre, at which an elderly woman sat with an open ledger before her. A girl was addressing her ; standing at the fireplace was a gentleman. The woman raised her head and stared at me as I went in, through her spectacles, doubtless to ascertain by my appearance whether I wanted a place or a servant. Inferring, I dare say, the latter, she politely begged me to be seated, saying that I should not be kept long waiting. The room was warm ; my exercise had flushed my face ; I raised my veil for air. I had stolen a glance at the gentleman confronting me ; just noticed the general points of middle height and shapely, supple form ; that he was fair, young, well-dressed, and very gentlemanly-looking ; and then fixed my eyes on the centre group. The woman at the table having written an address on a slip of paper, handed it to the girl, who paid her some money, painfully extracted from a long lean purse stiff with beads, and left the room. The gentleman advanced.

‘Mrs. Gregory, my mother is dissatisfied with the housemaid you sent us. She desired me to request that you will send her another.’

‘Are you in a hurry, sir, for ten minutes?’ said Mrs. Gregory.

‘No,’ he answered, looking at his watch; ‘but why am I to be detained?’

‘I am expecting two excellent girls here every moment, sir. I should like you to see them. If their appearance suits, I can send both to Lady Monck to choose. I am sorry her ladyship isn’t suited.’

‘I’ll give you ten minutes,’ he answered, returning to the fireplace.

Mrs. Gregory looked towards me. I rose and approached the table. I had been hoping that I should have had no other audience than Mrs. Gregory; the presence of the gentleman not a little embarrassed me.

‘I have arrived at Huddleston with the intention of procuring, if I can, a place as governess,’ I began, somewhat tremulously; ‘I am quite a stranger in this town, and know no one.

I have called here to ask if you know of any one in want of a governess.'

The woman examined me attentively through her magnifying spectacles, which swelled her eyes into an uncommonly ogreish size before she answered.

'Governesses is not in my way, miss. I confine my business altogether to servants. But if you'll leave your name and address I'll see what can be done.' She dipped her pen into the ink-stand.

'Miss Kate Howard, 12 Theodore Street,' I dictated. The pen scratched, the address was entered.

'When are you likely to hear?' I enquired.

'I can't say at all,' she answered. 'It will be three shillings, please.'

I took out my worn purse, and laid the money on the table. Raising my eyes, I saw that the gentleman was attentively watching me.

'If you'll be so good as to call in here the day after to-morrow,' continued the woman,

picking up the money, 'I may have something to tell you, miss.'

'You'll do your best for me,' I said, lowering my veil, 'won't you? I am very anxious to procure a situation as soon as I can.'

'What might be about the age of the children you'd like to undertake?'

'I should prefer young children,' I answered; 'children between six and ten years of age.'

'I'll remember, and promise to do my best. The day after to-morrow, please; about this hour.'

I left the office and got into the street, somewhat anxious to escape the fixed regard with which I had been honoured by the gentleman. Not that I could consider it impertinent; not that it was in the slightest degree offensive. I deprecated it as a calm and steady gaze that might identify me hereafter; and having, as I had, the fear of John Graham before me, I was resolved to make it my especial business to narrow to as small a compass as possible the opportunities of identification.

The time passed slowly. In the hope of

multiplying my chances, I had purchased the three papers which Huddleston published, and again and again waded through the small type of the advertisement sheets—but to no purpose. Everything was wanted *but* a governess. Factory-girls, seamstresses, cooks, housekeepers, ‘young ladies’ for shops were in great demand: governesses only were not required.

‘I should have gone to London,’ I reflected. ‘It is spoken of as a huge city, offering speedy succour to those who want, the safest refuge to those who need concealment. Peoples’ minds there are large, too; and there is great wealth and great liberality, and the greatest demand in the world for everything to which men have given a name. It is the city of opportunity.’

Such had been papa’s views: and such was doubtless the truth. My regrets, however, were a little premature; I had not yet given Huddleston a trial. In this large place, I thought, surely there must be some people who want a governess. The environs are crowded with spacious structures; the inhabitants may

indeed, be vulgar ; but what shall I care for their vulgarity so long as I shall have a roof to cover me, and am earning enough to enable me to find hereafter a better place?

The time came when I was to call on Mrs. Gregory. I walked with a beating heart to her office, and found her alone. She did not remember me at first ; and I had to announce my name and recall my business before I could make her understand what I wanted. This looked very ominous ; and I stood by her plunged at once into a most dejected mood, whilst obviously annoyed at her failing memory, she commenced cleaning the glasses of her spectacles. She had my three shillings, however ; and she would not let me think she had been so inattentive as she seemed.

‘I’m sorry I’ve got nothing satisfactory to tell you, miss,’ she said, polishing away at her glasses ; ‘I’ve made a good many enquiries, but haven’t heard of anything to suit. I don’t know how it is, but governesses *don’t* seem wanted nowadays as formerly. You see there’s so many schools.’

‘Is there no chance, then?’ I enquired.

‘I don’t say that,’ she answered, ‘we’re a large population, and there must be chances somewhere if we can only find ’em. Finding ’em’s the thing. Would you feel disposed to advertise?’

‘I have looked through all the papers and can find nothing,’ I replied sadly.

‘I don’t mean that; have you tried an advertisement yourself?’

‘I know nothing about advertising.’

‘It’s quite simple. Just write out what you want; I’ll put it into the paper for you. The “Herald” I should recommend. I advertise in that.’

‘But what will it cost?’

‘It all depends upon the length. You could draw one up as should only cost two shillings. But look here: wait just a few days before you advertise. It’s my place to try and suit you, for I scorn to take folk’s money without doin’ my best to return it ’em in the shape they want it. Look in again, will you, in a couple of days?’

I did look in again in a couple of days.

The office was full of people when I called, and I had to wait half an hour before I could speak to the woman. She had the same story to tell me. 'She had done her best—she couldn't do more; but we wasn't to despair. If I was passing that way again next day, would I step in? It was just likely she might have heard something by then.' I called, of course; a drowning wretch will catch at straws. Though hope itself be dead, its ghost sometimes walks, and to pursue the shade is better than sitting down in despair. There was nothing to tell me, as usual. This time she did not ask me to call again; but said she would write to me if she heard of anything. I left her with a cold heart and streaming eyes. Disappointment had clutched me in her chill embrace; she numbed my energie she broke my spirits. Hope, too, abandoned me and left me in darkness.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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